



AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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Put the BIG into Birding Big day! Saturday, 29 November 2014

Calling all budding beginners or backyard birders who enjoy watching birds from the comfort of the garden – have you decided where you will Bird your 'Hood this year? The Open Category and the Family/Community Category cater for the more serious twitchers looking for birds over a 24-hour period within a 50-kilometre radius. There is no entry fee. However, raise R250 or more in sponsorship for BirdLife South Africa's conservation work and you will receive a cloth badge and be entered into the lucky draw for a chance to win some fantastic prizes, including Chamberlain's, Garden Shop and Woolworths vouchers, weekends away and more. For more information, please contact Nikki McCartney. www.birdlife.org.za/events/birding-big-day or 083 636 1060 (BirdLife SA e-Newsletter, September 2014)



Join Agulhas NP to count Ostriches on 8 November 2014; contact E. De Kock, 028-4356078, office hours.

Agulhas birding

One of the key intentions in establishing Agulhas National Park was to protect a unique wetland system. 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. This 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. The avifauna of the region is diverse with 230 bird species being recorded, of which 11 are Red Data species. Significant populations of Blue Cranes and, to a lesser extent, the vulnerable Denham's Bustard, breed on the inland plains. (Agulhas National Park Management Plan, 2013-2023)



Pictures by S. Brink, W. De Klerk, L. Du Toit, L. Wolhuter, C. Steyn



Top 10 bird species in Agulhas NP as identified by Dr Wim De Klerk

Hottentot Buttonquail
Agulhas Long-billed Lark
Denham's Bustard
Yellow-billed Kite
Lanner Falcon
Cape Sugarbird
Caspian Tern
Orange-breasted Sunbird
Cloud Cisticola
African Purple Swamphen



Connecting to Society

Birding spots in Agulhas

The **Nuwejaars Wetland system**, an area of immense diversity and conservation value, provides unbelievable birding opportunities. 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 Soetendalsvlei and Voëlvlei. These vleis are inhabited by a large variety of avian and aquatic species, some of them extremely rare and endangered and some endemic to the area. This wetland system makes Agulhas National Park and its neighbours a significant part of three Important Bird Areas: De Hoop, Heuningnes River and Estuary, and Overberg Wheat Belt. These areas hold the largest populations of Blue Crane (*Anthropoides paradiseus*) in the world, and significant numbers of Denham's Bustard (*Neotis denhami*), White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) and Black Harrier (*Circus maurus*). Over 230 bird species have been documented in the Agulhas region. The Agulhas Long-billed Lark is endemic to the plain and near threatened. Genetic and vocal analyses also confirm that a second species, the Agulhas Clapper Lark, is endemic to the plain. The **coastline** supports a rich marine and intertidal life, with breeding sites of endangered and rare bird species, such as the African Black Oystercatcher (*Heamatopus moquini*) and the Damara Tern (*Sterna balaenarum*). (SOURCE: Wetland documents.)



Fynbos

The Fynbos plains in the Rietfontein and Ratelrivier sections are fast becoming the best birding sites for Birders in the know. Part of these plains is the Ratelrivier drainage system with Vispan and Drievleijtjies keeping their waters for most of the year. The veld on these plains has recovered remarkably after the 2009 fire.



Salt pans

The Saltpan at Springfield was the largest pan in the Strandveld and the largest producer of salt. Here, diluted brine was pumped from boreholes, wells and trenches sunk into the floor of the pan into large concentration ponds, where the liquid was allowed to concentrate into saturated brine. This saturated brine was then led into shallow crystallisation ponds to evaporate. Production ceased in the 1960s. The remains of the concentration and crystallisation ponds, production plant and manager's homestead are now part of the cultural heritage in the ANP and a famous birding spot.

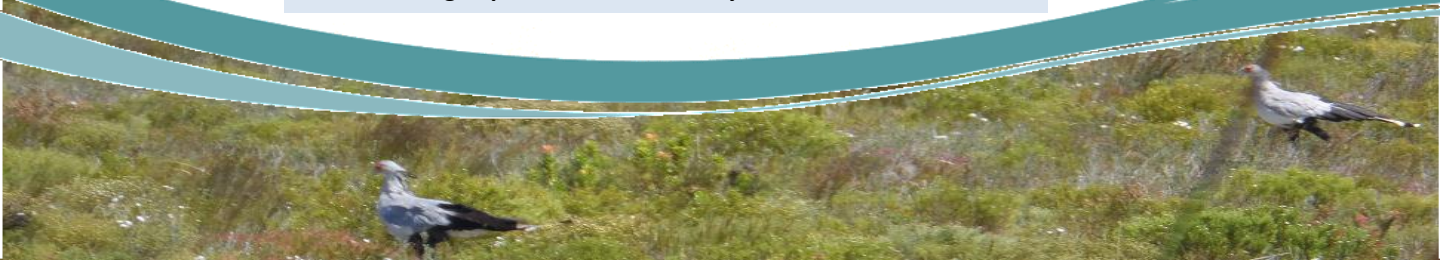


Melkbospan

Melkbospan is situated in the western section of the Park and is perceived as one of the smaller pans which are strongly saline to hyper saline. It is fed from the surrounding hills and keeps its water for most of a year and longer in exceptionally wet years. It is a favourite congregation spot for flamingos, depending on the water level. Milkwoods grow on the eastern side of the pan forming a natural bird-hide. Nearby is a big Milkwood stand with exceptional birdlife of its own.



Good birding depends on time of the year, weather and rainfall.



Agulhas birders reveal

Angela and Eddie, ANP Honorary Rangers

Best sighting: Over 100 Glossy Ibis in the wetlands on the Struisbaai/Elim road.
Favourite birding spot: Rietfontein, both in and around the *werf*.



Chris Van Gass, ANP Honorary Ranger

Best sighting: Hottentot Buttonquail in the Suiderstrand area; Black Harrier in his coastal "garden".
Favourite birding spot: Melkbospan and surrounds.

Sharon & Heine Brink, Photographers

Best sighting: Black Harrier at Southernmost Tip; Marsh Harrier in Agulhas wetlands.
Favourite birding spot: Southernmost Tip coastal zone.



Len Wolhuter, Birder

Best sighting: Orange-breasted Sunbird in the Rietfontein area.
Favourite birding spot: Entrance road to Rietfontein section and Melkbospan.

Louise Walsh, Birder

Best sighting: Hottentot Buttonquail in the Rietfontein area.
Favourite birding spot: Rietfontein se Baai pentad.



Dr Wim De Klerk, Birder

Best sighting: Hottentot Buttonquail in the Rietfontein area.
Favourite birding spot: Rietfontein area.

Birding highlights – Sharon Brink

One of the highlights of our visits to the ANP was the most unexpected visit by a Black Harrier to the coastline, we often see them over the fields but never on the coastal strip. Another stunning surprise was a Spotted Eagle Owl on the signpost Southernmost Point just below the Lighthouse. We had gone early for sunrise photographs and there was the owl sitting quite happily 'showing' the way to the southernmost point. The narrow bit of vegetation below the road that goes to Suiderstrand always seems to produce an unusual abundance of birdlife and here I am not referring to seabirds, but much rather your land-based birds such as Grassbirds, Cape Bulbul, Canaries, Cisticolas, Prinias and many more.



The mysterious case of one Petrus Gerhardus Lourens *c1779 (Continue) – Johan Lourens

The Cape Notice indicates Petrus Gerhardus's place of birth as Rhenosterkop, Bredasdorp, died in 1873 at Smithfield OFS, age 85, and married. Notice was filed 23 March 1785 with no indication of children. Deduct 85 from 1873 and you get to 1788. His "father" Matthys, farmed on Rhenosterkop which is a



good indication that this PG is Matthys and Catharina's son. The OFS death notice indicates place of birth as Cape Colony, died 25 August 1862 on the farm Waterval, age 83 years five months. Nine children are mentioned and if you deduct 83 from 1862 you get to 1779. The children on the notice and the date of birth 1779 are also a good indication that this is (also) Matthys and Catharina's son. Two death notices in two different provinces and baptismal records scrutinised indicate one and the same person. But our information indicates he was married a second time while his first wife was still bearing two more children under his name! The interesting thing is that the witnesses to the baptisms of most (six) of PG's 10 children during his "second marriage" was the children of Matthys' younger brother, Cornelis Janse *1762 – possible uncle to PG's children. Only one son of Matthys witnessed one of the baptisms and that was due to the fact that this son was married to his cousin, a daughter of Cornelis Janse who also attended the baptism. Perhaps there was a PG born c1788 that was Cornelis Janse's son. Cornelis' children were born between 1783 and 1802 and there is a gap between 1785 and 1793 for a child that could have been born in 1788. However, Cornelis' will dated 1809 makes no mention of a PG. The question then is, if this PG *1788 was the son of Cornelis Janse *1762, why no mention in Cornelis' will and why was it indicated on PG's death notice born on the farm Rhenosterkop of the parents, Matthys and Catharina? Was this PG *1788 perhaps an illegitimate son of Cornelis Janse *1762, but raised by the *veldkornet* and his wife? What mystery lies in the past in the Strandveld? Maybe one day more evidence will surface for us to know whether there was another PG born who was not the son of Matthys Lourens and Catharina Swart.



SANParks Honorary Rangers West Rand Region donated three pairs of night vision binoculars to the Agulhas National Park. Linda McClure from Johannesburg presented the donation to ANP Manager Bulelwa Msengi and Section Ranger Masindi Raselabe.



Spotted in my garden ...
Kaapse Grysbok (female)
Raphicerus melanotis
C Van Gass, ANP HR

Spotted in the Park



S.Brink

Lachnaea densiflora

Spotted in the media ...

Cape Mountain Zebra National Park

In 1936 the then Minister of Land, General Jan D.G. Kemp, was asked to establish a reserve for the endangered Cape Mountain Zebra. His famous reaction? "No, they are a bunch of donkeys in rugby jerseys." The Cape Mountain Zebra National Park was however established two years later near Cradock. (SOURCE: *Landbouweekblad*, 11/07/2014.)

Tankwa-Karoo National Park

In the 1970s a piece of state land was available to establish a conservation area. At the time it was seen as a piece of worthless, god-forsaken nothingness which was just good enough to shoot films and the then Parks Board was not interested. The original god-forsaken 27 000 ha of government land was proclaimed as a national park in 1986 and grew to the 146 373ha of today. (SOURCE: *Landbouweekblad*, 18/07/2014.)

"Until one has loved an animal, part of their soul remains unawakened." (Anon)



S. Brink