



AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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Wetlands for our Future

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World Wetlands Day

2 February

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World Wetlands Day February 2, 2015

The future of humanity depends on wetlands. They purify and replenish our water, and provide the fish and rice that feed billions. Wetlands act as a natural sponge against flooding and drought, and protect our coastlines. They abound with biodiversity, and are a vital means of storing carbon. Unfortunately, these benefits are not widely known. Often viewed as wasteland, 64% of our wetlands have disappeared since 1900. To turn the tide on the loss and degradation of wetlands, join up for World Wetlands Day 2015 – and beyond! February 2 each year is World Wetlands Day. It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on February 2, 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. World Wetlands Day was celebrated for the first time in 1997. By 2012, about 115 000 wetlands, covering over four million hectares and comprising close to four percent of the country's surface area, had been mapped in South Africa. The Department of Environmental Affairs is responsible for the South African Wetlands Conservation Programme, which ensures that South Africa's obligations in terms of the Ramsar Convention are met. (SOURCE: www.gov.za/world-wetlands-day-2015)

Agulhas National Park a Wetland Heritage

The reason for the establishment of the ANP was to preserve the unique wetland system on the Agulhas Plains. The ANP was promulgated on September 23, 1999 and since then much progress has been made to preserve the wide variety of wetlands that include springs, rivers, estuaries, floodplains, lakes, vleis and pans. The ecological functioning of the wetlands and other fresh water systems on the Agulhas Plains is critically dependent on water quality and quantity of these interlinked pans, wetlands, seasonal streams, flow and interchanges that occur under natural conditions.



Agulhas Working for Wetlands 2015/2016

Six new gabions are to be built in the Waterford Section of the Agulhas National Park in the 2015/16 financial year, as part of the activities of the Agulhas Working for Wetlands project. A six-percent increase has been approved on last year's budget and workers, or beneficiaries, of the project will be sourced from Bredasdorp and Struisbaai. The project will focus on the Waterford Section, while there are some "soft" options like earthworks and earth structures being planned in the Springfield area. The Working for Wetlands project had a delayed start last year while waiting for funding and only began its activities in mid-August 2014, instead of the planned April 2014 start. This meant that from the outset the project was in "catch-up" mode. With the planned 48 beneficiaries and four contractors on the APO it was possible to employ two additional teams, thus creating jobs for 22 more people and two contractors.



Connecting to Society

Pans and vleis on the western plains

Between Rietfontein and Ratelrivier in the ANP are a series of natural pans and vleis with interesting names. *Vispan* (Fish Pan), *Drievleitjies* (Three Vleis), *Melkbospan* (Milkwood Pan) - and of course *Wasvlei* (Washing Vlei), which derived its name from the practice by farmers to wash their sheep in the vlei during the shearing season, normally around September. This practice lasted until the mid 1900s. The flocks of sheep grazed Rietfontein's veld and were then transported by donkey or horse carts and wagons to the farm Nachtwacht, where the shearing took place. Nachtwacht is owned by the Albertyn family to whom Rietfontein, now part of the ANP, also belonged at the time. The flocks consisted of between 200 to 300 sheep. A special enclosure at the saltpans was called the rams paddock (*ramkamp*). A big furrow was dug from Dirk Uyskraal River, which passed *Wasvlei* and was diverted when *Wasvlei* ran dry. Salt was harvested on *Vispan*, which was called the saltpans in the olden days. Oom Piet Lourens, who lived at Rietfontein for 52 years, harvested 20 bags of salt at times. *Drievleitjies* is the furthest south on the plains and forms one pan during very wet seasons. *Melkbospan* is the most northern of these pans on the plains and is situated near a Milkwood stand, from which it gets its name. It is the most permanent of the pans on the plains. *Melkbospan* is a very good seasonal birding spot. The water that feeds the pans flow down from Geelrug during the rainy season and fill the plains. It was channeled into a furrow at some stage to control and to lead the water to the saltpans. The entrance road to Rietfontein crosses the furrow at the lowest point on the plains, passes *Melkbospan* and then runs down to the pans and vleis. The vleis and pans were also filled from the sea at the spot called *Waaiplek*, at high tide which also brought in *Springers*, a type of fish. This happened in the winter months from June. The plains were flooded regularly in the 1950s, but from the 1960s, when there was less rain, this was not always the case. (Piet Lourens Interview)



Birding along the Nuwejaars River – Dr Wim De Klerk

Birding along the wetlands on the Nuwejaarsrivier always proves to be very exciting as was experienced on December 18, 2014. We could hear the Black Crake (Swartriethaan) *Amaurornis flavirostra* in the reeds but did not see it. The impressive African Purple Swamphen (Grootkoningriethaan) *Porphyrio madagascariensis* appeared among the reeds, as well as some Common Greenshank (Groenpootruiter) *Tringa nebularia* and African Snipe (Afrikaanse snip) *Gallinago media*. Yellow-billed Duck (Geelbekeend) *Anas undulata* and Red-knobbed Coot (Bleshoender) *Fulica cristata* completed the picture. A Black Harrier (Witkruisvleivalk) *Circus maurus* hovered towards Soutbosch and disappeared. We moved further down river and found Kittlitz's Plover (Geelborsstrandkiewiet) *Charadrius pecuarius* and Common Ringed Plover (Ringnekstrandkiewiet) *Charadrius hiaticula*. A single Ruff (Kemphaan) *Philomachus pugnax* stitched away in the mud. African Spoonbill (Lepelaar) *Platalea alba*, African Darter (Slanghalsvoël) *Anhinga rufa* and some Reed Cormorant (Rietduiker) *Phalacrocorax africanus* occupied a distant island in the river. In the nearby grass the LeVaillant's Cisticola (Vleitinkinkie) *Cisticola tinniens* calls "chip-thjirolup"! From the reeds on the opposite side of the river the Lesser Swamp-Warbler (Kaapse rietsanger) *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* was similarly warbling contently. And then one of the highlights of the day was spotting a single Cape Teal (Teeleend) *Anas capensis* and a few Red-billed Teal (Rooibekeend) *Anas erythrorhyncha*. Then, in a secluded inlet, we suddenly spotted about eight ducks – Hottentot Teal (Gevlekte eend) *Anas hottentota*, the first record of Hottentot Teal in the ANP. As we enjoyed the scene, a juvenile African Marsh-Harrier (Afrikaanse vleivalk) *Circus ranivorus* gracefully hovered over the reed bed in front of us. Could it get any better!



C. Steyn



S. Brink



Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands (Wet Restioid Fynbos)

Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands consists of tall reeds of *Phragmites australis* and *Typha capensis*, restiolands, sedgelands and rush-beds, as well as permanent water body vegetation on sandy, silty and clayey soils derived from weathering Cape Supergroup shales and Cape granites, as well as Table Mountain sandstones. It is distributed in some of the vleis of the Agulhas Plains. The conservation target is 24%. About 14% is statutorily conserved in Agulhas National Park, other National Parks and Cape Nature reserves. More than 15% has been transformed by cultivation and urban areas. Examples of plant species are Dekriet *Chondropetalum tectorum*, Knoppiesbos Line-leaf Conebush *Leucadendron linifolium*, Pypsteelbos *Cliffortia ferruginea*, Vleirosie *Orphium frutescens*, Brakblommetjie *Limonium anthericoides*, Fluitjiesriet *Phragmites australis*, *Falkia repens* and Waterblommetjie *Aponogeton distachyos*. (SOURCE: Mucina & Rutherford; Mustart, Cowling, Albertyn)



Doreen Afrika - Wetlands beneficiary with the longest service record

Doreen Afrika believes in hard work. And her dedication to the Agulhas Working for Wetlands project has seen her notch up a 10-year service record. Doreen, who comes from Proteem in the Overberg and grew up in Moorreesburg, knew from an early age what hard work meant and that one day she wanted to provide for her family as best she could. Education was a key to this and she completed grade nine. Today she lives in Bredasdorp with her family. Doreen started working as a general worker in the Working for Wetlands programme in 2004 with contractor Lanza Mavusa, in one of the first contracting teams for this project. At the time all the expanded public works programmes had an exit strategy where teams could only work for a certain number of years before being asked to give others an opportunity. After the contractor left five years later in 2009, Doreen started working for contractor James Mavusa. Another five years have passed and Doreen today boasts with the longest continued service record in the Wetlands project. In the past 10 years she completed a number of training courses, enabling her to grow her expertise within the team. She has progressed to become the Health and Safety Representative of the project, an achievement she is very proud of.



Among the other courses she completed are First Worker, Mixing Concrete by Volume, Fire-fighting, Personal Finance and various other life skills courses. Not only do the skills programmes assist participants to learn about all aspects of the project, it also gives them the opportunity to apply for work outside the project. "Without the help of Working for Wetlands I would not have been able to get where I am today", says Doreen. Doreen mentions she still wants to "learn a lot" and her next goal is to "sit in Miss Simoné Koert's chair" (Simoné is the long-serving Office Administrator of the project).

Spotted on the Agulhas coast

Engelvis, Angelfish, *Brama brama*

Quite a common species all around the SA coastline. It is unusual, however, to find the fish this close to land as it is a deep water species occurring in about 200m of open ocean.

(<http://www.wwfsassi.co.za/?m=5&s=5&idkey=834>). (Info supplied by Dr G. Maneveldt, UWC)



Agulhas NP now has two resorts

The current Agulhas rest camp was split into two resorts, namely the Agulhas Rest Camp, on the coast, and Soetany's Rest Camp, inland. Read more in the March eBulletin.



2015 International Year of Soils and Light and Light-based Technologies

A new method to curb soil erosion in the ANP

A new product to combat soil erosion, known as “MacMat”, was introduced in the Agulhas National Park towards the end of last year. MacMat is a three-dimensional structure, or mat, made from mono-filament polyolefin material for the consolidation of natural topsoil to protect it from soil erosion by wind, rain, run-off or flooding. It is a permanent erosion control product composed of UV stabilised, non-degradable synthetic fibres. It provides permanent erosion protection on upland slopes, stream banks, wetland boundaries, and shorelines. The mats provide a stable medium to encourage natural colonisation and support healthy plant growth. In certain applications

MacMat may be used in conjunction with double twist wire mesh reinforcement, known as MacMat-R. When combined with galvanised and PVC coated woven wire mesh, MacMat-R is used for long-term root reinforcement, erosion control and re-vegetation. This unique combination marries the excellent anti-erosion properties of the three-dimensional MacMat geomat and the well-known strength properties of the Maccaferri mesh, thus extending the range of applications and diversity of the product. This intervention method was applied at Upper Ratelrivier. The head cut was first stabilised with a 36m³ rock pack and from there the banks were sloped and MacMat laid out. Natural plant growth is already visible giving a good indication of the success of the intervention at this point.



“Leap” Day for Frogs (SA) ~ 28 February

Amphibians are the most threatened class of vertebrate on earth with 32% of the species are listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable. Of the 15 amphibian species thought to occur on the Agulhas Plains and in the Agulhas National Park, three species, the Cape platanna (*Xenopus gilli*), Micro frog (*Microbatrachella capensis*) and Western Leopard toad (*Bufo pantherinus*) are Red Data listed. South Africa’s annual Frog Day is on February 28.

Family research and what it means to me – Johan Lourens

We can only understand our ancestors when we undertake the arduous and delightful historical study of time and place in which they lived. By studying the Lourens Family in South Africa, I am attempting to understand them better and to create a sense of belonging. **To know where you come from is to know where your anchor is.** I enjoy history from my high school days and family research is my perfect vehicle to scratch around in the past in a practical and purposeful manner. Many family publications concentrate mainly on a register with thousands of names that is in some way familial connected to one another. The intention of my study is to place the Lourens Family in a historical, social and economic context. Phase one will be concluded with a publication within the next two years of the Rostock and Wedderstedt family groups, from arrival in South Africa until around 1900. With my research progressing through the years, coming in contact with Lourenses in especially the Bredasdorp area, valuable Strandveld information supplied by Agulhas National Park and stories of Lourenses by Piet van As, I am inexorably drawn to *Die Strandveld*, making me realise that I have found my geographical anchor in life.

Lighthouse birthday weekend

28 Feb to 1 March 2015

The Cape Agulhas Lighthouse was lit for the first time on 1 March 1849. Tortoise@Lighthouse will be celebrating this with a weekend of events. Check our facebook for events. www.facebook.com/travellingtortoise



Arniston 200
Arniston Commemoration
29 – 31 May 2015
Shipwreck Museum
Bredasdorp, Waenhuiskrans



Salt pans 1890