



AgulhasNPark eBulletin

VOL 5 • NO 12 • November 2015

www.sanparks.org

Good birding awaits you in the Agulhas National Park and neighbouring Nuwejaars Special Management Area (SMA). The Nuwejaars River wetlands experienced good and long winter rains. The wetlands are full of water and this augurs well for good birding for the coming holiday season.

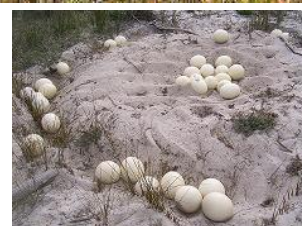
Birding Big Day (SA) ~ 28 November

Birds belong to the class Aves and, of the higher vertebrates, they are the most studied, the most easily seen and accessible, the most melodious and, many think, the most beautiful animals on earth. Fish are the only other vertebrates that have a higher number of species than birds. There are about 10 000 bird species distributed over most of the earth. They are found in forests, deserts, mountains and grassy plains, and on lakes, rivers and oceans. A few species have even visited the North Pole and one, a skua, was seen at the South Pole! Some birds dive to depths greater than 45m to prey on aquatic life while others live in caves and in this total darkness are able to find their way around by echo-location. South Africa has a rich diversity of birds with about 890 different species. In recognition of our bird heritage, BirdLife South Africa co-ordinates Birding Big Day, which this year will be the 31st. Birding Big Day is a competition open to everyone with the aim of seeing how many birds can be spotted on that day, within a radius of 50km. For more information about Birding Big Day, visit www.birdlife.org.za/events/birding-big-day or contact Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing on 083 636 1060 or events@birdlife.org.za. (SOURCE: *A Year of Special Days*, 2015, Sharenet; *BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter*, Oct 2015)

“Big” Birds in Agulhas National Park

Ostrich, Volstruis, *Struthio camelus*

The Common Ostrich is the giant of the avian world and an African icon in its own right. It features in man's cultural landscape as far back as the Neolithic times. Size, feathers, eggs and meat helped to cement the Ostrich's cultural prominence. A single adult bird would have delivered a major supply of meat to the earliest hunters; so too a nest full of eggs which can number up to 78. One egg is the equivalent of 24 chicken eggs and weighs 1,5kg. The internal capacity is more than half a litre and this accounts for what was probably their earliest usage as water carriers, the San hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari being the last to use them in this way. The ornamental use of the eggs has provided some of the best evidence for the bird's long-standing cultural importance. The oldest use of ostrich feathers is probably African. It was reserved for royalty and used for adornments in various ways and ceremonies. In the early 20th century ostrich feathers played a major part in the fashion world and resulted in a boom in ostrich farming in the Oudtshoorn area. The so-called ostrich palaces still to be seen today are evidence of that era, another cultural impact the bird has on man. (SOURCE: COCKER, M & TIPLING, D. 2013. *Birds and people*. London: Jonathan Cape)



Pictures by S. Brink



"Big" Birds in Agulhas National Park



Blue Crane, Bloukraanvoël, *Anthropoides paradiseus*

The Blue Crane is the national bird of South Africa. Although plentiful in the Overberg region, Blue Cranes remain under threat, with only some 25 000 birds left in South Africa. Most of the birds live within the Overberg's borders. The Blue Crane is listed as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Blue Cranes are monogamous. Despite being social birds, they are territorial while breeding. They have a beautiful courtship dance: two individuals dancing and jumping up and down with wings extended. They normally raise two chicks. Spot them on the agricultural fields of the Strandveld and Ruens. Visit the Overberg Crane Group's website: www.bluecrane.org.za for more information.



Denham's Bustard, Veldpou, *Neotis denhami*

South Africa's bustards are in trouble, with six of the country's 10 species listed in the South African Red Data Book. They are threatened by a variety of factors with some of the most important threats being habitat destruction and power-line mortalities. The Denham's Bustard is seen from September to April on old open fields of the Agulhas Plain. It is bigger than Ludwig's Bustard and the male is also bigger than the female. Colouring of the feathers varies between grey, black white, a deep rufous hindneck and mantle. During the mating season the male inflates its neck like a balloon, raises its tail and fans undertail coverts, looking like a white plastic bag in the veld. Denham's Bustard was previously called Stanley's Bustard.

Black Harrier, Witkruispaddavreter, *Circus maurus*

Black Harriers are a species of conservation concern, is threatened by habitat loss and are classified as *near-threatened*. It is a medium to large, jet-black bird with white underwings, white rump and barred black and white tail, seen quartering slowly, for long periods, over low vegetation around the Southernmost Tip, the Agulhas ridge, Sandberg and the Nuwejaars River wetlands. Black Harriers nest on the ground. (Rob Simmons, Odette Curtis and Andrew Jenkins)

Other "Big" Birds to look out for



Grootflamink, Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber* All year



Spur-winged goose, Wildemakou *Plectropterus gambensis* All year



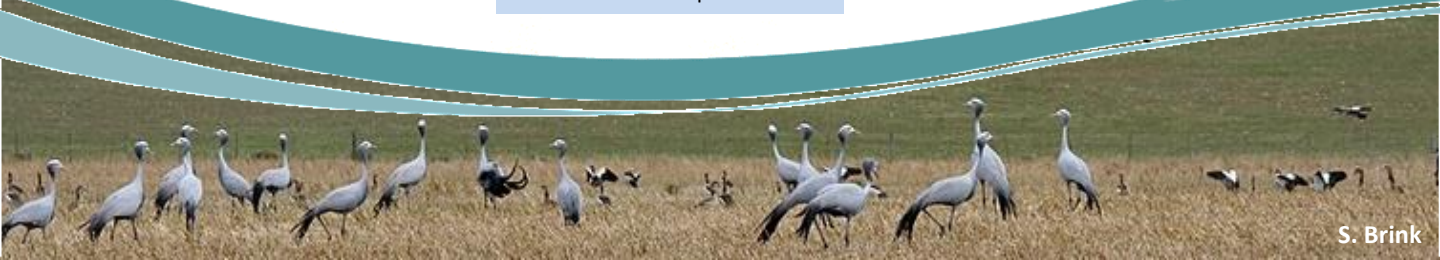
White stork, Witooeivaar, *Ciconia ciconia* Sept – Nov



Visarend, African Fish Eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer* All year



Great White Pelican, Witpelikaan, *Pelecanus onocrotalus* All year



Migrants of the Agulhas Plain - Dr W. De Klerk

October and November are exciting months for avid birders. This year will be no different after very good rains in the area. Why? Because every year for the past hundreds of years, something extraordinary has evolved. Birds from the northern hemisphere decide to leave for the warmer Southern hemisphere and for some reason decide to fly thousands of kilometres to the Southernmost tip of Africa! Some do it non-stop, others stop at feeding grounds along the way to stock up on body fat and energy for the journey. Incredible! The Agulhas Plain have 33 Palearctic Migrants visiting the area. Of these Palearctic migrants about 24 are regular visitors and fairly common. The more common species are **Yellow-billed Kite**, **Steppe Buzzard**, Common Quail, **Barn Swallow**, White Stork, Grey Plover, Common Ringed Plover, **Curlew Sandpiper**, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Little Stint, Common Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Eurasian Curlew, **Ruddy Turnstone**, Ruff, **Sanderling**, Sandwich Tern and Common Tern. The majority of Palearctic migrants seem to appear quite late in October, the exception being Yellow-billed Kite which appears in September. The Booted Eagle seen in July, more than likely is from the local breeding population and seems to stay in the area. Many of the migrant waders seem to reach the Southern tip of Africa only in November. Barn Swallows interestingly are seen for almost eight months of the year. The Common Whimbrel seems to have a local population that stays throughout the winter.



Intra-African migrants

The Agulhas Plain also have 15 Intra-African migrants. About 14 of these are fairly common. Of these **Lanner Falcon**, Forest Buzzard, Namaqua Dove and Acacia Pied Barbet would not normally be considered migrants, but it certainly seems to be the case from the records. Most of the swallows considered to be Intra-African migrants appear relatively early in September. These include White-throated, Greater Striped and Pearl-breasted Swallow. Do not miss the elegant African Paradise Flycatcher which will soon begin to appear in the Plain! Happy Birding.



Unravelling the secrets of wondrous wetlands and their wondrous waters: *FROM THEORY to Action* - Nabuweya Noordien, University of the Western Cape

Wetlands have intrigued scientists for many decades. With a change in human perception of the value of wetlands to society, scientists from various disciplines continue the quest to understand the many aspects of these unique systems, and although significant strides have been made, several gaps in understanding remain. This was highlighted at the **14th Biennial Ground Water Division Conference and Exhibition: FROM THEORY to Action** which was held in Muldersdrift, Gauteng. Wetland science featured prominently at the conference, and most of the wetland-related papers focused on the role of groundwater in wetlands, and the benefits of sustainable land and water management to ensure an uninterrupted link between these systems. The programme included case studies of wetland systems such as Kosi Bay, Ingula, Groenvlei, and the Overberg's very own Nuwejaars River and its associated wetlands, Voëlvlei and Soetendalsvlei. Wetlands continue to be degraded by human activities such over-abstraction of groundwater, pollution due to agricultural run-off, and the damming of streams feeding these systems, and this has resulted in many wetlands losing their natural function. In order to conserve and protect wetland systems, it is essential to understand how they function. **WE CAN ONLY MANAGE WHAT WE UNDERSTAND.**

The Biennial Ground Water Division Conference and Exhibition is a gathering of students, professionals, decision-makers and government officials to engage in discussions on everything groundwater (www.gwd.org.za)

Pictures by S. Brink, W. De Klerk, L. Du Toit and supplied



Sheep farming at Ratelrivier

The highlight of the farming year was the shearing – also done during the September holidays because we children loved to be around and Fletcher was being schooled to be a farmer. My father, Stephen Fry, farmed with 8000 sheep and many horses. We had a gang of about 30 shearers from Elim, mustered particularly for Ratel River. The same shearers came year after year and they were well paid and fed and they looked forward annually to the get-together. We had extra white men (about 10) to sort the wool which was baled in huge Hessian bags and trodden down by foot so that the bales more or less weighed about 300lbs (150kg). Wool was paid for by the pound. We had a special kitchen, pantry and scullery built and my mother had a team of cooks to prepare food for the shearing team. They were given three hot meals a day, morning tea and enjoyed an afternoon coffee break. The shearing shed was about 500m from the kitchen and a cart and a pair of horses were laid on to transport the food to the waiting team. The shearing shed was a large beautiful stone building with a thatched roof; the road to the shearing shed with its red gate could be seen from the window of the sitting room. It was subsequently knocked down and the dressed stone was used for other buildings by various owners later. The shearing took about a week, about 1500 sheep were worked per day. Everything seemed to run on oiled wheels. (SOURCE: *The History of Ratelrivier*, as told by Nell Naudé neé Fry; P. Van As, Fletcher family, P. Germishuys notes; pictures from Naudé family album).



SANParks connecting to society: Stakeholder engagement and public relations in our western communities – Alliston Appel

Since its inception in 1998 the Agulhas National Park (ANP) was involved with the communities of Stanford, Gansbaai, Pearly Beach and Buffelsjagsbaai in the Overstrand Municipal area. The Park also interacted with land owners on alien clearing initiatives. Alien clearing contractors from these communities worked for the Agulhas Working for Water project but excessive distance and other logistical challenges reduced the number of contractors from the Overstrand area over time. Resource use such as braai wood and sour fig harvesting were allowed, but the resources of *Rooikrans* were depleted and the Rietfontein and Ratelrivier area became inaccessible due to successful wetland restoration processes. This year the Working for Water project did some in-house chain-saw training at Ratelrivier and Park management decided that this was an ideal opportunity to supply much needed wood to the western neighbouring communities. Planning was done with the help of the Overstrand Municipal Area Manager, Francois Myburgh and Friday September 25, three truckloads of wood were delivered in Buffelsjagsbaai, Pearly Beach and Gansbaai. In Gansbaai the load were divided between Masakane, Beverley Hills and Blompark. Although this initiative missed the National Braai day the wood was otherwise received with great enthusiasm.



Fun Fact

The name *Geelbek* (or yellow mouth) for the restaurant in the West Coast National Park comes from the **Yellow-billed Duck** and not from the Geelbek (Cape Salmon) fish. – See more at: <http://magazine.africageographic.com/weekly/issue-65/west-coast-wonders-gallery/ag-mag-gallery/image/get-married-in-a-national-park-%c2%a9linda-basson-photography-1/#sthash.thMOMUQH.dpuf>.



Read more about Overberg birding: CHADWICK, P: *Overberg back roads: a birding hotspot*. (*Country Life*, Nov 2015, p 75)

