

AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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A new year is dawning!

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We wish you all a happy and peaceful 2016. Chief Tashka Yawanawá said: “We are all connected. Whatever you do affects me, whatever I do affects you. We have to take care of each other”. We add: “Take care of nature and nature will take care of you.”

Ratelrivier restoration to start at end of January

Ratelrivier farmstead was destroyed in the devastating 2009 fire. Only the main house and a workers cottage remained. The farmstead consists of buildings from the 18th, 19th and 20th century and reflects the Dutch pioneer era and the British rule of the Cape of Good Hope. Apart from the main house the structures built over time are stables, workers' cottages, pig sty, hunting dogs' kennels and a horse paddock. The centre of the main house dates from the late 18th century. The building was expanded over time with sections built on in the 19th and 20th century. The race horse stables and the workers' cottages were built in 1902. The restoration and development will start towards the end of January. A contractor was appointed and the site handover will be on January 25. It is an eight-month project and will be overseen by Fagan Architects.



Horses and stables at Ratelrivier

William Fletcher bought Ratelrivier in 1898 from a syndicate which was at that time being managed by a Mr Hughes – he was an uncle to Ron Philip of sheep dog fame. Uncle William was very rich by this time possessing about one and a quarter million pounds. The farm was a total of 20 806 ha with 22,6km of coast stretching from Pearly Beach to and including Brandfontein. The Fletcher family continued their gracious living from the Bon Accord days – it was gracious and extravagant. He bought race horses from overseas, they were beautiful and successful, and he raced all the major courses and had his own colours. Stephen, my father, was at one time his official jockey. Uncle William loved horse riding and he always used one of his best horses. Each day after tea the grooms would bring two saddled horses to the garden gate for Mum and Dad to go riding. They rode all over the farm and returned towards evening when the grooms unsaddled the horses, brushed them down and watered them at the same stream where I had gathered the watercress and where the wash houses were situated. One of our foremen was Hennie Geldenhuys (oom Hennie to us children). He was in charge of the horses and the stables, but was also the huntsman. There were two sets of stables, one for racehorses and one for the workhorses. The racehorse stables were built in 1902 by Piet Van As, present day Piet Van As's grandfather. There were individual Oregon pine stalls for the stallions. On one side was a wagon-shed and on the other side fodder rooms and *tuiekamers*. The buildings are built with limestone with thatched roofs. The ceilings were also Oregon pine. The bottom stables for the work horses were changed into living quarters, a wagon-shed, smithy, school room and garages. (SOURCE: *The History of Ratelrivier*, as told by Nell Naudé, neé Fry; pictures from Naudé family album).



Kids in Parks 2015

The 2015 Kids in Parks (KiP) programme was held from October 15 to November 18, 2015. A total of 472 learners and 14 teachers/staff participated in the activities. The programme consisted of a mix between the natural and cultural aspects offered by the Agulhas National Park - but there were also fun-filled leisure activities to liven up the event. Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum and the Overberg Fire and Rescue Services in Bredasdorp were also part of the 2015 programme. Environmental Educator Gretha Louw presented an interactive fresh water programme where the learners looked at all kinds of *goggas* through a microscope. Our water is definitely still very healthy!! The 2016 KiP dates are October 12 until November 17.



More camera traps put up in Agulhas National Park

After the initial trial run in 2014 camera traps were put up in the Park at strategic points to monitor animal activity. They will be moved around from time to time to obtain optimal data of animal movement in the Park. The camera sightings will support research and management decisions. Watch this space for interesting sightings.



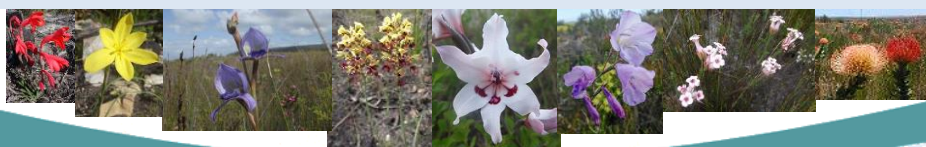
Celebrating Birding Big Day at Waterford

Our very industrious Conservation team under guidance of Section Ranger Lindsay Lewis of the Waterford section built owl boxes for displaced and injured owls at Waterford as part of the Birding Big Day 2015 celebrations. Two pairs of Spotted Eagle-owl (Gevlekte ooruil, *Bubo africanus*) and a Barn Owl (Nonnetjie-uil, *Tyto alba*) with injuries were found in the outbuilding at Waterford. Their injuries were of such a nature that they would not have survived out in the wild. Since the outbuilding was renovated and closed off the Rangers felt they should provide new shelter to these owls. The boxes were mounted in the trees around the office complex and the Spotted Eagle-Owl moved in. Only the Barn-owl still needs to be lured into its new home. (Owl and flower pictures by L. Lewis)



Waterford, the most western section of Agulhas National Park

Waterford farm was acquired in 2007 and measures nearly 4053ha. It is the highest piece of land situated in Agulhas National Park and at present separate from the rest of Agulhas land. It was acquired for biodiversity purposes as the farm encompasses the upper catchment of the Ratel Rivier system, which flows through the wetlands at Ratelrivier homestead (also part of the park) and out into the ocean. This is a Critical Biodiversity Area as identified by the provincial conservation authorities, CapeNature, and was top priority for Agulhas to purchase and include in the park. Agulhas National Park is now clearing the aliens within the catchment to secure precious water sources for the country, the park is also working with private landowners along the middle piece of the catchments (outside the park) to clear aliens along the Ratelrivier. The farm also has unique geology, it has a band of Western Coastal Shale running through the property, resulting in rare and endemic plants species growing here. (*Cape Research Centre*) Waterford dates from 1860 and originally belonged to the Van der Bijl family of Fairfield. In those days they used it for grazing for their cattle. When SANParks acquired the land it was mostly used for flower farming. Today it has its own Ranger station managed by Section Ranger Lindsay Lewis, one Field Ranger and four Environmental Monitors.



Wetland mapping at the Waterford section of Agulhas National Park

The Cape Research Centre team and partners from CapeNature visited Waterford in November 2015 to map and ground-truth wetland areas in this most western section of the Park. The Waterford Conservation team accompanied them and learned some valuable lessons in field work. The visit highlighted that the Waterford section of the Park conserves the source areas of three river systems. These are the Ratel, Hagelkraal and Boesmans Rivers. The team has completed the Ratel River catchment and is busy with the Hagelkraal catchment. The team plans to have the GIS edits done for the Ratel River and the sections of the Hagelkraal River mapped thus far for the meeting in February 2016. World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on February 2.



Ground truthing establishes in field whether an area is in fact a real wetland and to verify the borders of these wetlands. The ground truthing also verifies the classification of each wetland visited. Areas not previously mapped as wetlands are also added to the national and provincial wetlands databases. Ground truthing the Waterford area is part of the National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas (NFEPA) wetland programme which at first was a desktop exercise, with expert opinions, and which is now followed up with fieldwork to verify the mapped areas. In addition, data on wetland soils and vegetation communities are also collected and a photographic database is kept for each wetland visited.

Initial alien clearing in Agulhas National Park is almost done!

For 2016-17 the Agulhas Working for Water Project plans to clear the remaining 1336ha initial areas of alien infestation. This, 18 years since the Project started in 1998 and the Park started with the four hectares around the Southernmost Tip. It also includes the new land that was acquired in 2014 which brought the Park to 21,971.0161ha. This is quite a feat if measured against the alien specimens, Port Jackson and Rooikrans, which is being eradicated and also taking into account the impact the 2009 fire had on the clearing programme. The fact that the Project was doing so well over the years, meant that it received extra funding each year. It also helps that a dedicated team is managing the Agulhas Working for Water Project. After 2017 it will be follow-up work to keep alien re-growth in check. We will follow-up with what the natural emerging landscape means to plant- and birdlife.



Mapping rare plants in Agulhas National Park

The Agulhas Field Rangers recently assisted the Cape Research Centre (CRC) to map the localities and population of rare plants in the Park under the guidance of Trevor Adams. All the rare plants the team is aware of are being identified, mapped and documented. In future these specimens will be monitored accurately. The plants are mapped by using cyber-trackers and filling in data-sheets which will be uploaded and captured electronically.



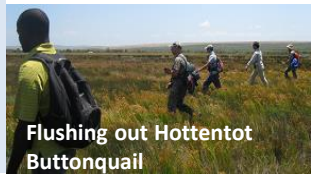
Agulhas NP Tourism on the fast track

For the first time since opening the inland rest camps the Park showed an influx of visitors for December 2015 and, they stayed booked all the time. In total 6226 individuals visited the rest camps for December. Unit occupancy for Agulhas Rest camp was 77.4%, Bergplaas 38.7%, Rietfontein 36.8% and Rhenosterkop 50.5%. The Agulhas Rest camp was a Provincial Finalist in the 2015 Lilizela Tourism Awards in the category Accommodation Award for Service Excellence.



The elusive Hottentot Buttonquail being researched in Agulhas National Park

Recently a project application to research the Hottentot Buttonquail, Kaapse Kwarteltjie, *Turnix hottentottus* in Agulhas National Park was received by the Cape Research Centre in Cape Town. Reports of sightings in Agulhas National Park caught the attention of researchers. The only previous research conducted on Hottentot Buttonquail (Ryan and Hockey 1995) found them to occur in ideal habitat within the Cape Point Section of Table Mountain National Park. This research was undertaken two decades ago and the applicants hoped to reproduce aspects of the original study in order to estimate potential changes in the species density in this area specifically. The sightings in Agulhas NP might represent a stronghold for this species. However, the reports were unconfirmed by researchers, and needed to be further investigated due to confusion with Common Quail, Afrikaanse kwartel, *Coturnix coturnix*. Researchers know from experience that all you see when flushing out a Hottentot Buttonquail is its backside, either flying away or running away from you. Sightings of Hottentot Buttonquail are extremely rare, thus the plan was to focus on potential known areas of occurrence – which included Agulhas National Park and also West Coast NP. Permission was granted and the research team under guidance of Dr Alan Lee of the Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town and Dale Wright of Birdlife SA visited Agulhas from December 1 to 4. They were accompanied by Dr Wim De Klerk. What they found surpassed their expectations by far!! 11 sightings of Hottentot Buttonquail, eight in Agulhas and three on private land. Read Alan Lee's blog spot <http://bluehillescape.blogspot.com/2015/12/cape-agulhas-heros.html>. (SOURCE: Research application, 2015; pictures supplied)



Flushing out Hottentot Buttonquail

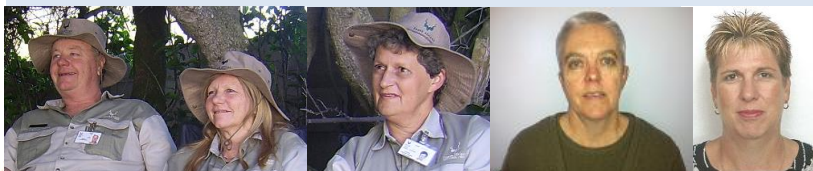


Our national bird goes high tech in the Western Cape

The Endangered Wildlife Trust, in partnership with the International Crane Foundation has launched a project in the Western Cape to understand how Blue Cranes use, and move within the landscape of the Western Cape. Individual adult birds are fitted with a GSM GPS tracker after being fitted with unique colour ring combination on its legs. Thereby the birds' movements can be tracked. Cranes are one of the oldest families of birds alive in the world today and the Blue Crane is a near endemic to South Africa, with only a small isolated population of fewer than 60 birds found in Namibia. The rest of the world's population of about 25 000 to 30 000 birds are found within our borders. The southern tip of Africa is home to at least half of the world's population of Blue Cranes; which is astounding considering Blue Cranes occurring in the Western Cape is a relatively 'recent' spectacle. Partners in this project are the Table Mountain Fund, University of Cape Town's Percy FitzPatrick Institute, CapeNature and the Overberg Crane Group. For more information contact Tanya Smith, Southern Africa Regional Coordinator, at tanyas@ewt.org.za. (SOURCE: *Grus Grapevine Newsletter*, December 2015)

Agulhas Honorary Rangers

The Agulhas Honorary Rangers had their annual general meeting on 21 November 2015 where the new office bearers for 2016 were elected. They are: Chairperson William Eliot, Deputy Chairperson Angela Altendorfer, Treasurer Cornelia van Rooyen, Secretary Elrina Versfeld and Admin person Beverley Eliot. We thank them for their continued support to Agulhas National Park.



Mr P Grobbelaar
The oldest person recorded to climb Cape Agulhas Tower at 90 years of age on December 10 2015; he climbed the 71 steps of the tower.

