

AgulhasNPark eBulletin

VOL 6 • NR 5 • April 2016

Save Earth Save Ourselves

www.sanparks.org



"But the big decisions that lie ahead are not just for world leaders and policy-makers. Today, on Mother Earth Day, April 22, I ask each one of us to be mindful of the impacts our choices have on this planet, and what those impacts will mean for future generations." UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Overberg Parks assisting one another to fight fires



A veldfire raged through the Waterford section on February 28 2016, destroying 1115 ha of vegetation. Bontebok National Park's Conservation team came to assist fighting the fire. Fortunately most of the area which was burnt was old veld and in need of a burn. After two days the fire was put out and staff could take a well-earned break.



Researchers from the Cape Research Centre visited their research plots on March 22 to assess the impact of the fire on the plots and the veld in general. Already the veld is recovering and is showing off the beautiful *Watsonia sp* and *Protea* seed dispersal. We will show you in upcoming editions how the veld comes back to life.

Agulhas Reception and Administration building revamped

Agulhas National Park can now boast with a renovated reception and administration building in Main Street, L'Agulhas. Renovations started in mid-January 2016 and finished mid-March. The roof, walls, windows and doors were repainted and repaired where needed. New windows were added and changed. A plus is the reconstructed tiled stoep with veranda and a disability access ramp. A new large signage board was erected in front of the building to ensure that visitors do not miss the Agulhas NP reception area.



Important dates for May

13 May: Southern Tip Day Talk & Meal (*Evolution of navigation beacons through the ages* by Louis Willemse)
16 May: Southern Tip Day
18 May: International Museum Day – Theme: Museums and Cultural landscapes



Connecting to Society

International Mother Earth Day, April 22

Earth Day is a global attempt for international co-operation to address issues such as global warming, toxic waste, destruction of rainforests, expanding deserts and ocean pollution. Individuals and organisations are encouraged to use Earth Day to take environmental action in their area. More than 22 000 organisations in 192 countries around the world participate in Earth Day activities. The 46th anniversary of Earth Day is celebrated this year. This day marks an opportunity for volunteers to initiate actions towards a sustainable future. Volunteers may join the *Green Generation* and register on the website www.earthday.org/takeaction. For more information visit www.earthday.org. To measure your carbon footprint download *My Carbon Footprint* (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food) from sharenet.org.za. (SOURCE: *A Year of Special Days 2016*, Sharenet)



Global warming crushes records

For the surface of planet Earth, 2015 was the hottest year on record by a stunning margin. But already, 2016 is on track to beat it. January was the hottest in 137 years of record keeping, according to data released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the ninth consecutive month to set a new record. Some of the recent extremes are the result of a monster El Niño weather pattern that still lingers in the Pacific Ocean. But the broader trend is clear: We live in a world that is warming rapidly, with no end in sight. Since 1980, the world has set a new annual temperature record roughly every three years. Fifteen of the hottest 16 years ever measured are in the 21st century. If the rest of 2016 is as hot as January, it would shatter the records set in 2014 and 2015. Results from the world's top monitoring agencies vary slightly, but NASA, NOAA, and the Japan Meteorological Agency all agree that January was unprecedented. The El Niño weather pattern that started last year produced some of the hottest temperatures yet witnessed across great swaths of the equatorial Pacific. By some measures, this may now be considered the most extreme El Niño on record. It has triggered powerful typhoons, caused drought in Africa, and contributed to vast fires in Indonesia. The heat in January was experienced differently around the world. Some of the most unusual warmth swept the Arctic, where ice levels fell to the lowest on record for this time of year. The heat that is dispersed into the atmosphere during an El Niño can linger, which means there is a chance 2016 will turn out to be the third straight year to set a new temperature record. (SOURCE: Tom Randall, ©2016 Bloomberg News.)



Internal staff transfers in the Agulhas NP – Masindi Raselabe, Section Ranger East

Four internal staff transfers were made in the ANP, effective from March 1, following the transfer of four Gate Guards to the Technical and Conservation departments. Andy Macpherson was appointed as a handy man in the Technical Department, which now has a Technical Officer and two handymen, boosting the capacity of this small department. Andy started work in the park as a general worker for the Working for the Wetlands project and was appointed as a gate guard in February 2013. The three other gate guards, Savimbi Louw, Ralph Snyders and Dewald October, were transferred to the Conservation Department as Field Rangers. All three started work in the park as Environmental Monitors in June 2012, before being appointed as gate guards in February 2013. Their appointments increase the number of rangers in the park to 10 and will strengthen the Conservation Department's ability to conduct patrols and law-enforcement.



Field Rangers Savimbi Louw, Ralph Snyders and Dewald October above Handy man Andy Macpherson left

The SANParks Volunteer Programme helps with basic skills – Wendy Johnson, People & Conservation officer, Table Mountain National Park

The SANParks Volunteer Training Programme is a six months training programme followed by six months voluntary service. A minimum of 20 adults are recruited yearly, mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds on the Cape Flats and surrounding areas. The purpose of the programme is to equip participants with the basic knowledge and skills in mountain safety, law-enforcement tourism, guiding and conservation and Environmental education. The knowledge is applied in particular areas such as the mountain trails, experiences in the city, historical sites, information centres and in the national park. The trainees are required to develop a portfolio of evidence of their learning experience and present their topic and reflection at a symposium. The trainees spend 70% of their training in the field and 30% on classroom work. The successful candidates will be able to use the knowledge and skills gained to further their development in a number of fields, including environmental education, tour guiding, entrepreneurship and as field rangers. This programme is run on a volunteer basis - facilitators are not re-imbursed for any expenses incurred while in the programme and they are dependent on donations and sponsorships. (Picture: Trainees with Mr P. Gordon, Park Manager, Table Mountain National Park and Aslam Levy, Program Co-ordinator)



Birder and Working for Water participants go birding

Agulhas Working for Water celebrated World Water Day in March with Dr Wim De Klerk, known for his bird identification project in Agulhas National Park. The participants enjoyed his presentation so much that Dr De Klerk had to extend his talk. He said the impact of the work done by the Working for Water participants was that natural landscapes were returning to the Agulhas wetlands and plain, bringing back birdlife. This meant that more people would visit the Park to enjoy the emerging landscapes and the life they contain. The group ended the day with a walk to the Salt pans to do a little birding of their own.



Lesser Flamingo numbers are on the increase. About 900 were spotted at the Salt pans on March 25



Pelican numbers increase on Agulhas Plain

During the recent Easter holidays Agulhas birding expert Dr Wim De Klerk met with local farmer Johan de Kock, who has made an interesting observation regarding the Great White Pelican. The pelican numbers have increased dramatically over the past few years and De Kock said he counted 400 recently. The problem is that the pelicans, for some reason, congregate near his sheep, which are fed daily. The lambs then, for some reason, go to the pelicans instead of their mothers, especially in the first three days after their birth. The pelicans do not harm the lambs, but they lose their mothers and then die if De Kock does not keep an eye on them daily. Dr De Klerk counted about 200 pelicans himself, once again in the veld next to the ewes. Six years ago there was great excitement if 20 to 50 pelicans were seen.

BirdLife SA Bird of the Year 2016

The Sociable Weaver, *Versamelvoël*, *Philetairus socius* is the Bird of the Year for 2016. It is an icon of southern Africa's arid zones and one of the draw cards that bring people to the Kalahari. These weavers are small birds with big personalities and they have a complex social life, living in colonies that can be hundreds strong. The colonies are like villages, made up of families organised into close-knit societies with strict social hierarchies. Although Sociable Weavers are not found throughout South Africa, other weavers are more widespread. Read more at www.adu.org.za. (SOURCE: *BirdLife South Africa e-Newsletter*, March 2016)



Picture: A. Odendal

The Salt pans

The Salt pans are one of Agulhas National Park's most iconic spots of interest. They are culturally significant and a very important birding site. The pans are also called the Springfield Salt pans. Salt was the first mineral to be exploited in South Africa during colonial times. Salt was used for flavouring food, curing skins and hides and preserving fish and meat. The traveller and explorer, Peter Kolbe, reported during his stay at the Cape between 1705 and 1713, the discovery of saline pans near Elim and Bredasdorp area. In 1791 the VOC administration at the Cape took over ownership of these pans and leased them to prospective operators. In the early 19th century the system of granting leases by public auction was adopted. Salt prices were fixed. This system remained unchanged after the Cape became a British colony in 1806. The growing fishing industry was one of the main markets of salt production in the Bredasdorp region. The Saltpan at Springfield was the largest pan and the largest producer of salt. From 1914 to 1950 the Springfield pan was exploited by the *Springfield Salt and Farming Company (Pty) Ltd*. The pan and the mineral rights were sold to Lord de Saumarez in 1950, who continued its exploitation until production ceased in the 1960s. The remains of the concentration and crystallisation ponds, production plant (factory) and manager's (or caretaker's homestead) are now part of the cultural heritage in the Agulhas NP. Today the Salt pans is a very good seasonal birding spot and an important breeding site for birds, especially the Chestnut-banded Plover, Rooibandstrandkiewiet, *Charadrius pallidus*.



Pictures: C. Steyn



Chestnut-banded Plover, Rooibandstrandkiewiet, *Charadrius pallidus*

A small light-coloured plover with a narrow chestnut band on its breast; it breeds on saline lagoons, salt works and pans; easily disturbed and will leave nest; breeding season from March to September; its status is near-threatened.



Pictures: C. Van Gass



Sour fig harvesting project 2015

The Agulhas National Park provides access to neighbouring community groups, who comply with permit conditions, to harvest sour figs in the Park. The Rietfontein area of the park yielded the most and best sour figs due to low height of vegetation and veld which was burnt five years ago. All the objectives set for the year have been achieved. In all 34 Harvesters completed and handed in data sheets which a yield of 6319kg of sour figs. Not all of the participants sold their harvest – some was kept to make jam. Read more about the project in the May eBulletin.



Misryblom, Bloedblom, April fool, *Haemanthes coccineus*

The *H coccineus* flowering now all over the southern coastal area was the first South African plant specimen to flower in Europe in the collection of a Flemish plant collector in 1603. By 1611 it was extensively cultivated in Holland. Thunberg recorded in 1733 that the plant was used by the colonists as a diuretic and for asthma. The bulbs were sliced and steeped in vinegar mixed with honey. *Coccineus* has spots on its stem and flowers from January to April. (Info supplied M Swart). *H sanguineus* which grew more inland has a solid red stem. The flowers turn into red berries. Both specimens have various names. Wine farmers commence carting manure into the vineyards during flowering time, hence the vernacular name of "Misryblom". (SOURCE: MANNING, J. 2007. *Fieldguide to Fynbos*; SMITH, C.A. 1966. *Common Names of South African Plants*).



Picture: M. Swart

