

AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction

www.sanparks.org



World Wetlands Day 2017

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on February 2 each year. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands (on February 2, 1971) in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Since then the Ramsar Secretariat has provided promotional material to help raise public awareness about the importance and value of wetlands. The future of humanity depends on wetlands. Wetlands 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 burst 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. By 2012, about 115 000 wetlands, covering over four million ha and comprising close to 4% of the country's surface area, had been mapped in South Africa. This mapping will be updated in 2018. 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. The Department of Environmental Affairs urges all South Africans to get involved in wetland conservation and restoration. Protect this water resource by reducing environmental impact and using water wisely. For more information go to www.gov.za/speeches/world-wetlands-day-2017; www.worldwetlandsday.org. (SOURCE: Ramsar Convention: Pocket Guide to South Africa.)

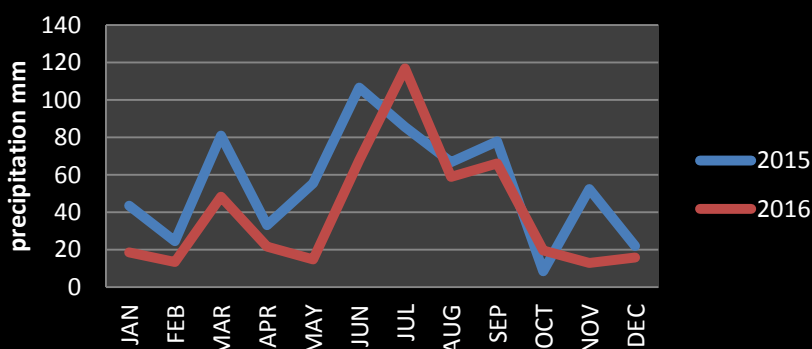


Agulhas Wetlands much drier - Lindsay Lewis, Section Ranger, Agulhas West

The wetlands of the Agulhas Plain are home to a variety of bird species and is a popular birding destination. One of the main reasons the park was established was to protect the unique network of freshwater springs, rivers, estuaries, floodplains, lakes, vleis and pans that occur in the area. The wetland attracts large numbers of resident and migratory birds annually. However, the wetlands have not been as wet in 2016 as recorded in previous years; the pans and vleis received less water and dried up earlier due to less rainfall and hotter conditions.



Ratelrivier Rainfall 2015-2016



As indicated in the graph less rainfall has been recorded during 2016 than in 2015 in the Ratelrivier area. The highest rainfall in 2016 was during July (116.85mm) and the lowest was during November (12.9mm). Rainfall data is being recorded with an automated weather station that records rainfall, temperature, wind speed and humidity.

We welcome Thobela Mata, Assistant Project Manager for Working for Wetlands and Working for the Coast

Thobela recently started working as an Assistant Project Manager for Working for Wetlands and Working for the Coast programmes at the Agulhas National Park. He began his career with SANParks after he completed a National Diploma in Nature Conservation in 2013 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. He served a practical year in the Camdeboo National Park and continued working there as an unarmed Environmental monitor/Research Assistant under the Working on Land BSP programme. He received a *Groen Sebenza* internship with the South African Biodiversity Institute and was placed in Bracken Nature Reserve (managed by City of Cape Town: Biodiversity Management Branch) as an Assistant People and Conservation Officer.

In 2015 he returned to SANParks as a Field Ranger at the Table Mountain National Park where, as an Environmental Management Inspector (Grade 5) he gained law enforcement experience.



Strandveld Icons

Icons which represent the natural and cultural diversity of the Strandveld have been identified by the Agulhas National Park.

Soetendalsvlei

The very low gradients in the south-eastern Agulhas Plain resulted in significant wetland development and created the second largest lacustrine wetland and permanent water body in South Africa, Soetendalsvlei. It is the southernmost lake in Africa and the biggest fresh water lake which drains into the sea in South Africa. Soetendalsvlei from north to south is 8km long and 3km at its widest. The inlet is the Nuwejaars River and the drainage to the sea is the Heuningnes River at De Mond.



Soetendalsvlei is named after the first documented shipwreck on the Cape Agulhas coast.

During the night of August 23 1673 the VOC ship, *Zoetendaal*, ran aground on the rocks in a bay. By daybreak the survivors started to walk towards the Cape and arrived at a big lake with fresh water. They were so grateful that they named it after their ship, Soetendalsvlei. Together with the Heuningnes River estuary at

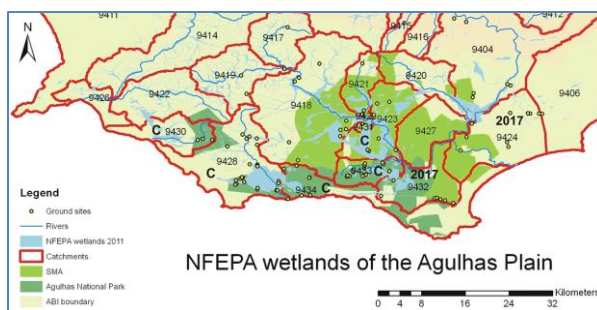


De Mond, Soetendalsvlei forms an important breeding and feeding area for both fresh water and marine fish species. Soetendalsvlei is also an important birding area. It is interesting to note that Soetendalsvlei and the Southernmost Tip are both situated on the meridian of 20° east. Soetendalsvlei is not accessible to the public.

Wetland mapping in the Agulhas Plain: an update –

Ruth-Mary Fisher, Cape Research Centre

The wetland data is being updated as part of the NBA 2018 (National Biodiversity Assessment 2018). The plan is to have an updated wetland map for the country by the middle of 2017. On the Agulhas Plain fieldwork has been completed for the Hagelkraal (catchment 9430) and Ratel River (9428). The catchments on top of Soetanyssberg stretching from Bergplaas to Hangnes (9433) and at the back of Soetanyssberg, stretching from Rietfontein to Struisbaai (9434), were completed during November 2016. Catchments 9434 covering Strikdas, Soetendalsvlei and Soutbosch and catchment 9424 (outside of the park) will be completed during 2017. See map. The GIS updates will be completed for the catchments where the fieldwork is completed during February 2017. The partnership between SANParks and Cape Nature is still going strong and is the backbone for ground-truthing the NFEPA Wetlands layer in the Western Cape. During November 2016 a group from the CSIR joined in the fieldwork. The CSIR has been given the task to help with updating the data for the NBA 2018.



February in Khoe (*ong*)/o-ha means “stars dead”; origin unknown.

SANParks Honorary Rangers Agulhas Region donations



SANParks Honorary Rangers Agulhas region Chairperson William Eliot handed over 10 binoculars to the Conservation section of the Agulhas National Park. From left Section Ranger Masindi Raselabe, ANP Manager Johan Taljaard and William Eliot. The binoculars were donated by the SANParks Honorary Rangers Conservation Services National Project.

“Leap Day” for Frogs, February 25

The third national awareness day for southern African frogs will be held on February 25, 2017. It is one day of the year dedicated to appreciate and protect one of the most threatened group of animals on Earth - Frogs! These important creatures are disappearing all over the planet largely because of habitat destruction. South Africa’s smallest frog is one of its most threatened. The Micro Frog, which grows to a maximum length of 18mm, is Critically Endangered and found only in four localities in the south-western Cape, of which Agulhas National Park is one. The EWT Threatened Amphibian Programme (EWT-TAP) will use the day to highlight the protection and conservation of three of our most endangered frog species: Amathole Toad, Pickersgill’s Reed Frog and Western Leopard Toad, also a resident in the Agulhas NP. For more interesting frog facts go to <http://www.leapdayforfrogs.org.za/>.

Bird of the Month

Common (Steppe) Buzzard, Bruinjakalsvoël, *Buteo vulpinus*

The Common Buzzard is one of those species that could be classified as a “member of the migrant welcoming committee”. Every year from September onwards, birders in the Agulhas Plain look for the arrival of these summer migrants - Steppe Buzzards on the telephone poles along the Struisbaai-Bredasdorp road are one of those. Common Buzzards can be very confusing as their plumage can be variable. The dark morph Common Buzzard almost looks like a different species! The only other species that frequents telephone poles are Jackal Buzzards. Immature Jackal Buzzard are often confused with the Common Buzzard as they can appear very similar. The Common Buzzard is smaller with narrower wings, underparts and under coverts streaked or barred dark brown. A rufous tail is the tell-tale sign of the Jackal Buzzard. To add to the confusion, Common Buzzards should not be confused with the Forest Buzzard which is almost always seen in alien forests in the area, perching in a tree and not in the open on telephone lines. It has much more white with almost teardrop blotches on the chest. Both species seem to arrive in summer, the Forest Buzzard being an intra-African migrant. In 2016 the Steppe Buzzards had birders worried, as September and October came, but no Common Buzzards appeared. Was there some natural disaster that decimated them on their migration route? Then at the end of November they appeared in large numbers and conservationists could relax! (W. De Klerk)

Agulhas Wetlands much drier continues

Coordinated Water bird Counts (CWAC) are being done at all the water bodies inside the park during mid-summer and mid-winter. The census data has been compared for the two years and show less bird totals in 2016 than the previous year during the same time period. If all this is a sign of climate change as it is being experienced worldwide the unique biodiversity of this area will face certain adverse impacts should this trend continue. With the highest temperatures recorded worldwide since 1882, as well as 2015 being the driest year for South Africa since 1921 and 2016 already hotter than 2015, this indicates that 2017, and the years to come, may not be much wetter or cooler.



Wetlands Birding Melkbospan
February 2015



Melkbospan December 2016



Micro Frog



Western Leopard
Toad



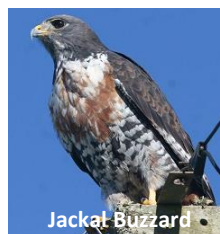
H. Brink



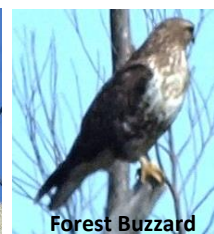
Dark morph Common



S. Brink



Jackal Buzzard



Forest Buzzard

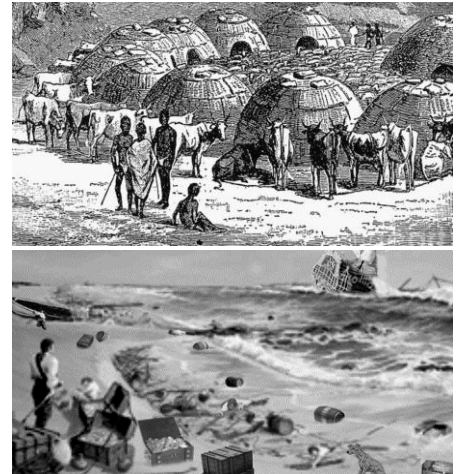
FLIGHT FOR BIRDERS course, Fernkloof Nature Reserve Hall,
Hermanus, 4 & 5 March 2017, www.westerncapebirding.co.za

The correct Khoe terminology – Dr Janette Deacon continues

Thirdly, the word San was also derived from Nama. Sa(a)n is a man/woman who gathers (food), i.e. a Bushman. The word is derived from sàà, or sã (a long ‘a’) which is the verb ‘to forage, gather, glean, collect or pick up’. Thus the literal translation of Khoisan is ‘a person [who] gathers’. Although it had no meaning to the people themselves, it has become entrenched in our political vocabulary. San, Khoekhoen and Khoe-San are preferred spellings and Khoe-San is more correct than Khoi-San. The San Council, which would like to emphasise the difference between the San and Khoekhoen, prefers to refer to “Khoe (or Khoi) and San” for the collective, i.e. separate words without a hyphen, or alternatively Khoe-San. Distinct San groups prefer to be known by the language they speak, such as the /Xam who lived in the Karoo in pre-colonial times, or the !Xun and Khwe who live near Kimberley after being moved from Angola and Namibia. (SOURCE: Haacke, W.H.G. and Eiseb, E. 2002. *A Khoekhoegowab Dictionary with an English-Khoekhoegowab Index*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan. Deacon, Janette. 2016. Unpublished notes.)

Shipwreck survivors and the Khoekhoen – Jimmy Herbert

Of the first three ships to meet their end around the Southernmost Tip of Africa, most of their survivors who made it to the Cape (about 200km away) owe their lives to the Overberg Khoekhoen. No mention is found in the archival documents (of the time) that those from the *Zoetendaal* (1673) had received any local help. Nine years later, a diarist survivor off the *Joanna* writes in his June 4 1682 entry that, while staying over at a Khoekhoen village, they found out that three years earlier [1679], more than 200 white people had come to that place. It turned out that their ship came to grief a few days earlier. Because some had not been able to go any further, the Khoekhoen had kept them there for 10 days to recuperate, after which they guided them back to the Cape. These 200 survivors could have been from the *Ternate*, reputed to have come to grief on the Cape Agulhas shore in January 1680. (To be continued)



Did you know?

Necrogeography is the study of the cultural geography of burial places. The word *necro* comes from the Greek word *nekros*, meaning corpse. The study, research and mapping of burial places or cemeteries form an integral part of the management of a cultural site, such as a historical farmstead. Headstones in farm cemeteries do not only supply important information on previous inhabitants of the farm and the area, but are also invaluable sources for genealogical research, naming patterns in families and possible disasters or epidemics of bygone eras. (SOURCE: RABE, L. *Grave matters: cemeteries as cultural landscapes – the German cemetery in Philippi*. SA Journal of Cultural History, vol 30 (Nr 1) July 2016, edited by Dr Matilda Burden)

Ratelrivier graveyard

The graveyard is situated on a high rise in a milkwood stand a few hundred metres south-west of the *werf*. It was in this graveyard where a potshard from the Stone Age was found. It is an interesting graveyard and a site which was thus also used by pre-colonial people. The people buried there are shipwreck victims – an unknown French ship’s captain and his wife, as well as a number of other drowned seamen washed up on the beach - one known as *Die seeman se graf*. It is unknown which grave this is. Jacoba Alida Van Breda, murdered wife of Dirk Van Breda, is buried there, but the grave was never identified properly. Other people buried there are Fletcher family members, Fry family members, Gildenhuys family members, Nigrinie, Oupa Ouland Germishuys and children’s graves. Some of the graves had cement crosses which were badly vandalized. The Fletcher and Fry graves are covered with engraved cement slabs. Other grave decorations are bottles, a porcelain pot and wooden board. In total there are about 25 graves.



Jacoba Alida Van Breda’s grave?



Gildenhuys



Gildenhuys, H J



Fletcher father and son

