**Agulhas National Park: unique wetland systems**

One of the aspects of founding Agulhas National Park was to protect a unique wetland system. A wide variety of wetlands occur in the area. The ecological functioning of the wetlands and other fresh water systems on the Agulhas Plain is critically dependent on water quality and quantity of interlinked pans, wetlands, seasonal streams, flow and interchanges that occur under natural conditions. The Agulhas Working for Water project did sterling work over the past 18 years to open up this unique landscape of wetlands and fynbos.
The Cape Agulhas Lighthouse is the second oldest and southernmost lighthouse in South Africa, as well as the oldest government building in the southern Overberg region. Planning started in the 1830s and it was finally built in 1848. The light was lit on March 1 1849. The Surveyor-General of the Cape Colony, Col C.C. Michell, designed the building according to the ancient Pharos of Alexandria in Egypt. Limestone was mined at the quarry about 200m west of the lighthouse and the farm Zoetendals Vallei. In 1962 the building was declared unsafe. To save it from being demolished the lighthouse was declared a national monument in 1973. In 1983 it underwent its first major restoration and again in 2012. The light beam can be seen for 30 nautical miles (55km) from the sea at night. The tower is 27m high and painted in red and white bands which are called day markers. The black false windows on the sea-side are also seen as day markers. The light flashes every five seconds at night. The lighthouse is still functional and houses the only Lighthouse Museum in Africa. In 2016 the Lighthouse was declared an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers.
Interesting sightings in the Agulhas Plain

Spotted in the Park ...

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Blouwangbyvreter
Merops persicus
Only the second recording in the Agulhas Plain (WdK)

Amethyst Sunbird
Swartsuikerbekkie
C amethystina
First recording in Agulhas Plain (W. De Klerk)

Spotted in the Nuwejaars SMA ...

Little Bittern, Kleinnietreier
Ixobrychus minutus
Only the second recording in the Agulhas Plain (W. De Klerk)

Spotted at De Mond ...

Common Cuckoo,
Europese koekoek
Cuculus canorus
The first official record in the Agulhas Plain spotted by Des Hall

Caught on camera ....

Nuwejaars SMA

Secretarybird
Sekretarisvoël
Sagittarius serpentarius

Black-backed Jackal
Roooljakkals
Canis mesomelas

The season has changed .... Flowering now

Maartlelie
Amaryllis belladonna

Bloedblom
Haemanthus coccineus

Koningskandelaar
Brunsvigia orientalis

Did you know?

Have you ever seen the Renosterbos Elytropappus rhinocerotis with the strange white foam blobs that are sometimes present on them and wondered what it is? These slimy white gals are not seen on other plants in the area, but is common in short fynbos vegetation. They are made by small insects called Fynbos Spittlebugs Rhinaulax analis, more commonly known as Froghoppers. The nymphs are surrounded by a frothy mass resembling spittle, produced from a mixture of anal secretion derived from plant sap and air. This blob protects them from predators and from drying out. Once adulthood is reached, these sap-sucking bugs live in the open and rely on their jumping skills to escape danger. Studies show the adults can leap up to 70cm. They can jump further than fleas. Sent in by Agulhas West Rangers. (SOURCE: nationalgeographic.com; PICKER, GRIFFITHS, WEAVING. 2004. Field guide to Insects of South Africa; www.projectnoah.org/spottings/13556004)

Celebrating International Wetlands day in the Overberg, Agulhas National Park - Carin Malan & Chris Cheetham

BirdLife Overberg joined Agulhas National Park to celebrate International Wetlands day on February 4. Unfortunately being held up with some birding on our way, but who would not stop for, amongst others, ....... the Agulhas Long-billed Lark!!, we arrived late. SANParks staff very kindly turned around and came to fetch us. We were in an area which could be accessed for the first time in years by a vehicle, the Soetendalsvlei area. Apart from several other species, we saw hundreds of different waders; 11 African Snipes in one place!! We moved on to the Saltpans which was dry unfortunately, but saw a pair of Secretary Birds on the way. There were lots of Greater Flamingos at Rhenosterkop pan. At a Milkwood forest next to a dam an Amethyst Sunbird was sighted, which was a first ever for the Agulhas National Park. At the end BirdLasser scored 94 species in overcast and very windy conditions. The Agulhas National Park is certainly a birder’s paradise and has something to offer for novice as well as experienced twitchers. For the full report visit http://www.westerncapebirding.co.za/overberg/news/2317/celebrating_international_wetlands_day_in_the_overberg%2C_agulhas national_park

World Water Day walk, March 23, 4km, Rhenosterkop back road to the Saltpans

Contact E. De Kock, 028-4356078 during office hours
**Sour fig harvesting in Agulhas National Park – Alliston Appel, Snr People & Conservation Officer**

Sour figs have traditionally been harvested by local communities throughout the Agulhas region. Consequently, when Agulhas National Park (ANP) was established and subsequently expanded, park management inherited the current challenge of managing sour fig harvesting for sustainable resource use in a way that complements SANParks primary mandate of biodiversity conservation. At least two species of Carpobrotus, namely Carpobrotus edulis (Hottentotsvy) and Carpobrotus acinaciformis (Swerrv), are known to occur in the park. However, only the latter is harvested for its sweet and sour fruits that are produced in two fruiting seasons each year. *C. acinaciformis* initially produces its fruits during December and January, but also supports a late harvest in March. The sour figs are harvested for subsistence and small-scale commercial purposes, where the fruits are eaten or used to make jams and preserves. Yellow soft juicy figs are sold for approximately R40/kg while dried figs fetch a price of approximately R12/kg on the local market. A feasibility study of sour fig harvesting as a resource use project with community benefits, estimated that 3kg/ha of sour figs are currently harvested over 3000ha of the park, producing an annual yield of 9000kg. The annual contribution to the local economy was estimated at R 90 000. Consequently, the harvesting of sour figs appears to be able to yield potentially significant socio-economic benefits for local people. The data capturing of the amount of sour figs (kg) harvested in the Agulhas NP do not give this info as the illegal component cannot beverified and current figures vary around R70 000 per annum.

**Shipwreck survivors and the Khoekhoen – Jimmy Herbert continues**

On the morning of Monday June 8 **1682**, survivors on the deck of the Joanna, fast breaking up, observed "the wild people" (as they had put it) on the sandy beach at Die Dam. Terrified of the latter, yet with the will not to drown, many were compelled to leave the ship in an attempt to make it to shore. On arrival and to their relief and amazement, the Khoekhoen all set about helping wherever they could. Even in the pouring rain, the Khoekhoen helped the English to gather firewood and get fires going. Once the overland trip commenced, they took the route showed to them which led them almost directly to the village of Captain Klaas, the local Khoekhoen leader (Swart River and Bot River). In turn, after ensuring that all had enough to eat and drink, the latter even accompanied them all the way back to the Cape. Captain Klaas was a Chainouqua leader.

The march to the Cape of the surviving crew, passengers and slaves that made it to shore from the Portuguese ship Nossa Senhora de los Milagros in **1686**, was completed with much less assistance from the local Khoekhoen than their predecessors. As a result, many paid with their lives. The greatest losses were from the largest group of mainly Portuguese and slaves, who had left others behind to fend for themselves. This latter group of 15 Siamese Nationals, hopelessly lost and without any navigation equipment or navigation skills, wisely decided to spend time in the "place of plenty" at the Mussels River at what is today Hermanus. It was close to this place that three Khoekhoen, sent by the Dutch, found them. These three locals not only guided them, but also continuously motivated the barely alive Siamese all the way to the Hottentots-Holland outpost successfully and safely. (To be continued)

**Overberg Khoekhoen**

Two Khoekhoen groups lived in the area between the Hottentotsholland Mountains and the Breede River before 1652. They were the Chainouqua in the west and the Hessequa in the east. Their territories, however, overlapped from Tygerhoek (Riversonderend) to the Breede River. They were traditional herders with a nomadic lifestyle and their movement was dictated by grazing and water. The Chainouqua was also called the Soessequa after a leader, Sousoa.

March in Khoen !haar#gais means “turned ears”, hyrax or dassies give birth.