



AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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"It is all about birds ..."

www.sanparks.org



Where did all the penguins go? - Trudi Malan, African Penguin and Seabird Sanctuary

We all know that Africa is not for the faint hearted and the African Penguin is a perfect example of African tenaciousness. The story of the African Penguin (Brilpikkewyn) *Spheniscus demersus* is not a good story to tell. This iconic bird is on the brink of extinction. We have lost 99% of our African Penguin population through no fault of their own. The following are factors which led to the demise of the African Penguin population:



Forced removals



Guano is an Inca word for a mix of eggshell, feathers, decayed corpses and bird excrement. Before the advent of artificially produced fertiliser, guano was considered a top quality fertiliser rich in nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. In the 1800s, which is when the "White Gold" rush began, a ton of guano fetched ten pounds or more in London. That translates to 580 pounds per ton in today's terms. The guano was scraped from the penguin breeding islands. On Dyer Island, the guano layer was between 4 to 6m deep.

Penguins used to build their nests by burrowing into the thick layers of guano. This "forced removal" from well protected, temperature controlled burrows to open surface nests, exposed the African Penguin to the harsh African heat and occasional flooding. The open nests turned their eggs and chicks into an easy meal for predators like gulls and skuas. (To be continued)

Did you know?

The acronym SHIT (Stored High in Transit) actually derives from the transport of guano. Because guano is rich in ammonia – the overwhelming ammonia fumes caused by the wet guano stored in the hull of ships, caused some serious health issues for sailors. It was therefore decided that guano bags must be stored in the middle of the ship to prevent them from getting wet. Bags were stamped with the acronym S.H.I.T to indicate that these bags must be Stored High In Transit.

What do you do if you come across a stranded penguin or seabird?

People often associate penguins with oil spills, but penguins do strand for a variety of other reasons including wounds, exhaustion, dehydration and disease. A penguin on the beach or rocks, away from a breeding colony, is normally a penguin in trouble. Keep dogs and people away. Do not put the bird back in the water. Do not feed the bird. Contact the Sea-bird rescue line on **072 598 7117** immediately. Provide the following information: Area and name of the beach. If you are not familiar with the area, look for landmarks to provide directions. The rescue line operator will give you further instructions on what to do. Always look out for the signage below.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A STRANDED PENGUIN OR SEABIRD

PENGUIN RESCUE LINE:
072 598 7117

A penguin on the beach or on the rocks outside of a colony is normally a penguin in trouble.

- Keep dogs and people away
- Do not feed the bird
- Do not put the bird back into the water
- Contact the penguin rescue line
- The Rescue co ordinator will provide further instructions

The African Penguin & Seabird Sanctuary is open to the public from 09:00 - 16:00
Corner of Rensvoort & Frankfort Road

AFRICAN PENGUIN & SEABIRD SANCTUARY

Oiling:

The threat of oil spills from ships also affect the penguin population. The biggest incident of this nature was when a ship called *Treasure* stranded on Robben Island in the year 2000. Twenty thousand African Penguins were oiled.



blog.capepointroute.co.za



Agulhas Birding Day at Southbosch – Wim De Klerk, Agulhas Plain Birding Project

It was a misty Saturday morning in September when a group of birders met at Southbosch in the Agulhas National Park. It was quiet, almost eerie, being offered coffee in this old and small historic house; like being back in the 1850s! After a short introduction the group went off on another memorable outing, joined by Nadier Roos and the Overberg Eco-Rangers. Barely 100m away from the house the first spectacular displays were encountered – Cape Clapper Lark and Cloud Cisticola displaying beautifully. A minute later a **Black Harrier** hovered past, then an African Marsh-harrier. The bright yellow of the breeding **Yellow Bishop** and the Cape Longclaw with its bright (breeding) orange throat kept the cameras clicking in the perfect photographic light. It was an LBJ festival as Agulhas Long-billed, Red-Capped and Large-billed larks in breeding mode were spotted. The singing never stopped. Le Vaillant's, **Grey-backed** and Cloud cisticolas filled the quiet gaps! Just as tea-time approached a **Denham's Bustard** put up a spectacular display. After a welcome tea break, the group went in search for the Chestnut-banded Plover, but only found Karoo Scrub-robin in the nearby fynbos. The Springfield Saltpan delivered Common Greenshank and Pied Avocet. The first Greater Striped Swallow of the summer season was seen. A Rock Kestrel flew by when leaving for Krotoa's hut, the last stop for the group. A demonstration of spishing delivered Cape White-Eye, Cape Bulbul and - to the astonishment of the group - a Lesser Honeyguide. On the way back to Southbosch the **Chestnut-banded Plover** was found on the northern shores of the Saltpans. 75 species were spotted during the morning! The most important thing is that more people are now aware of this wonderful asset, the Agulhas National Park, offers: it is truly the best-kept secret birding destination.



SB

SB

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S. Brink



A. Appel

Power lines impact on the future of Blue Cranes – Heather D'Alton

Power line collisions could potentially tilt the population of Blue Cranes from stable to declining. That is according to Endangered Wildlife Trust researcher, Christie Craig, who addressed the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) meeting in September. Blue Cranes are listed as Vulnerable to extinction on the IUCN Red List. The Overberg is a haven for the country's national bird, with about half the population of remaining birds found here. But the vast power line infrastructure in the Overberg and Swartland districts is reason for concern. According to Christie big birds cannot manoeuvre quickly in flight and therefore collide with power lines. They also have lateral vision, so cannot see that well in front of them. Wind and poor light also play a role. According to past research by UCT's Jessica Shaw, in the Overberg, Blue Cranes are most vulnerable to power line collisions, followed by Denham's Bustards. (To be continued)

How you can get involved

In a new citizen science project, Christie is also asking birders to adopt a section of a power line in the Overberg. The aim would be to walk this section once between December and May and record any carcasses found. This information would be fed back to Christie and the EWT, to support management actions to protect Blue Cranes. For more information, contact Christie: support@bluecrane.org.za or 066 289 5988.

A Birding moment

A newly hatched Kittlitz's Plover chick, about 40mm ball of fluff by Sharon and Heine Brink



© Sharon Brink



The Southbosch resident Secretarybirds

L. Wessels

Birds of Prey in the Overberg – Steve Peck, Napier Birding

The Overberg area of South Africa stretches upwards from Cape Agulhas to the Robertson region and from east of the Hottentots-Holland mountains across to Riversdale on the way to the Garden route. This area is blessed with many different types of vegetation, from coastal regions to thick forests, from desert areas to rich fynbos patches, all of which make it an ideal region to seek out many different types of raptors. It is the home of choice for over 20 different types of birds of prey....birds like falcons, hawks, eagles, kites, owls and vultures. To the right are some images of the most popular ones that are either resident in the Overberg or are migrants to the area. So if you are looking to tick some raptors on your list, then this is a great place to start.



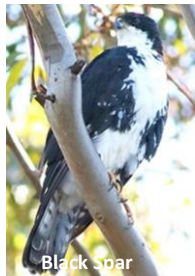
Fish Eagle



Black-winged Kite



African Goshawk



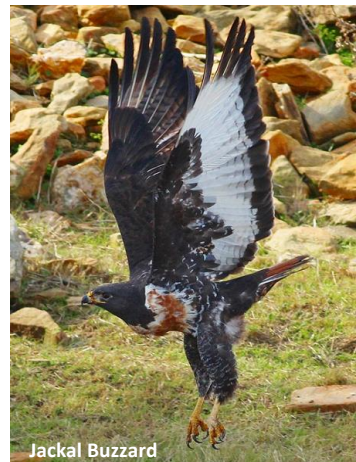
Black Spar



Gymnogene



Lanner Falcon



Jackal Buzzard



Grey-winged Francolin



Agulhas Birding Big Day 30 November 2019

On Saturday, November 30, the whole of South Africa competes in the Birdlife SA Birding Big Day. In the Agulhas Plain we also participate, but we make it a real fun day co-ordinated by the Agulhas National Park, Agulhas Plain Birding Group, Cape Nature - De Mond Nature Reserve, Agulhas Honorary Rangers and the Nuwejaars SMA. We compete for the BIG BIRD *Groot Voël* trophy and there might even be a prize for the team with the best spirit! Teams consist of three to four members (preferably four) and as teams build their list, other teams can actually see live whether they are competitive, using the Birdlasser App. This year teams will also compete by province, which means there is a competition within a competition. Participants register on the Birdlife SA website:

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2019/> and then contact Wim at doc@agulhasplainbirding.co.za for further information.



Zitting's Cisticola by S. Brink



Karoo Prinia



Ground Woodpecker
K. Le Roux



Cape Grassbird
S. Brink



Spotted Flycatcher

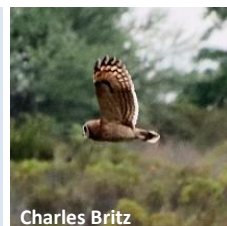


Plain-backed Pipit

SANParks Honorary Rangers (Agulhas Region) Birding weekend -

Anton Swanepoel, Honorary Ranger Agulhas Region

Another successful birding competition weekend was held at the Bontebok National Park from October 18 to 20. This was the second birding weekend organised by the Agulhas Region of the SANParks Honorary Rangers. Sixteen birders took part and a total of 116 species were sighted. A highlight was to see a **Marsh Owl (Vlei-uil) *Asio capensis*** during the day and to observe **Olive Woodpeckers (Gryskopspeg) *Dendropicos griseocephalus***, who decided to build their nest 30cm above the ground in front of one of the look-out points, feeding their chick all day.



Charles Britz



Charles Britz



November in Khoe *!kani//khab* means "moon of the Eland, the start of the Eland breeding season."



Twenty years on: how the Agulhas National Park has developed

2017

The Ratelrivier farmstead and stables restoration completed. The Southern Tip development is in full swing with the paving of the gravel road, the preparation of the Icon construction site and the development of a new circular hiking trail. The Agulhas Working for Wetlands rescues a critically endangered fish species of the family *Pseudobarbus* sp. 'burchello' "Heuningnes" while working in Pietersielieskloof, a tributary of the Nuwejaars River. The Agulhas Plain Birding website went live in April 2017 with the aim to raise general awareness of the Agulhas Plain as a birding destination. The Agulhas Conservation teams were issued with Fishery Control Officer (FCO) cards with which to identify themselves when patrolling the coast. The Southern Tip Monument was completed in time to receive the December holidaymakers.



2018

SANParks' Corporate Social Investment unit chose to establish a Science Laboratory at Albert Myburgh Secondary School in Bredasdorp, near the Agulhas National Park. Agulhas National Park appoints two new female Section Rangers: Carmen Gagiano and Nosipho Tyagana.



Agulhas Kids in Parks 2019 – Alliston Appel, Snr People & Conservation Officer and Programme Coordinator

The 2019 Kids in Parks programme started on October 2 and finished on October 23. Die Bron, Gansbaai, Masekhane, De Heide and Protea Primary schools took part. In all 308 learners and 15 teachers attended this year's programme. The main focus was on the learners' natural and cultural heritage and to encourage them to take an interest in conservation. Mortimar De Boer, De Mond Nature Reserve (Cape Nature), supported the programme with presentations on the marine environment and animals caught up in plastic pollution. The schools also visited the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.

Inspection dive of the *Le Centaure* – Jimmy Herbert

The *Le Centaure* was a homeward bound French East Indiaman sailing from Mauritius to France. On January 19, 1750, she passed Cape Agulhas. The wind was down to a slight breeze and the sea was totally calm, which is often the case in this area, one or two days before Spring Tide (full moon). On passing Cape Agulhas, the prevailing breeze was not adequate to stop a local current from pushing the ship into the bay west of the cape. The inshore current carried them shoreward until the ship hit a sand bank lying off Die Walle (today 9,3km west of Cape Agulhas Lighthouse) about 1,7km off shore. The vessel was permanently fixed in the thick sand and lying exposed to the prominent, yet powerful, South western swells. The *Le Centaure* broke up very quickly and sections were washed away and deposited over the full area, all the way to shore. On the first visit by humans to the ship's underwater resting site (1983), I was the third person to descend down to her bones, never to forget the moment landing on the sandy bottom. Looking up and east, a host of large rusted French iron cannon was sighted. All were lying on the open sea side of a 12m-stretch of heaped of ballast stones, stacked more than a metre high. The ballast stones were large (roughly 40cm x 34cm x 35cm). Their placing indicated where the hull of the ship had remained for months after striking the rocks and before nature stepped in as protector and covered her with tons of sand – she has been preserved by nature ever since.

