



AgulhasNPark eBulletin



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"It is all about birds ..."

www.sanparks.org

South African
NATIONAL PARKS

Birding Big Day 2020

BirdLife South Africa's 36th Birding Big Day (BBD) will take place on Saturday, November 28. Participants can join one of two categories namely an open category and a community category. The rules for each category are available on BirdLife SA's website. The Open category teams consist of a maximum of four members and the Community category teams cater for large groups, such as bird clubs, who want to enjoy the day birding together. There is no limit to the number of team members. Teams are requested to limit the use of callback to attract birds to an absolute minimum (preferably avoiding using callback at all). This is especially true when birding in a nature reserve or national park or targeting threatened bird species. Only free flying birds are recorded. You need to register before the event by completing the online form. There is no entry fee. For more information, contact bbd@birdlife.org.za. Teams are invited to log their sightings on the mobile app BirdLasser. For more information about BirdLasser, visit www.birdlasser.com. (SOURCE: <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2020/>)



Soutbosch Birding Big Day

The 2020 Birding Big Day will be managed from the Soutbosch farmstead on the Elim road about 8km from the tar road between Struisbaai and Bredasdorp. Apart from birding, visitors can also walk, cycle and canoe on the Nuwejaars River. You can bring your own refreshments; coffee and tea with light refreshments will be available.

African Grass Owl: quo vadis? – Wim De Klerk

In June 2006, Pieter van Oudshoorn discovered the first African Grass Owl (*Grasuil, Tyto capensis*) in the Agulhas Plain. This was the first record of African Grass Owl in many years this far south. Then, in December 2006, he found four young chicks on a nest; proof that they were breeding at this site. This area was the size of a rugby field and for this reason it was kept quiet. Pieter monitored the area yearly ever since and confirmed a pattern of yearly breeding at this site. I was shown this site in 2018 by a very energetic 70 year old Pieter, who shared all his knowledge at the time. He asked me to help him monitor the owls and to protect the site from being trampled by too many observers. With the help of the farmer and owner we achieved this by visiting the site as little as possible. But Pieter was always puzzled by the fact that he finds eggs and chicks every year. Surely they must go somewhere, but where? So far there has been no other records registered on SABAP2. This is about to change. In November a team will start searching for this beautiful owl starting at the original site and cover similar habitat to the south. May we find many more breeding sites!



Living Planet Report

The Living Planet Report 2020 is available, and its findings reveal we need to mend our relationship with nature - urgently. Already the average population size of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles and amphibians has declined by 68% since 1970. One in three freshwater species and one in five plants are threatened with extinction. A third of the food produced globally is wasted while too many people go hungry. We must act now to give nature a chance. Read more at <https://livingplanet.panda.org>.



Earth Overshoot Day – Ecological Deficit Day - Gavin W. Maneveldt, Dept of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, University of the Western Cape

Biodiversity (the total variety of all living organisms on the planet) provides various goods (such as food, fuel, medicine and building materials) and services (purification of air and water; stabilisation of our climate; moderation of floods and droughts, and prevention of soil erosion; pollution control, and the generation and renewal of soil fertility; cultural, recreational and aesthetic benefits), all of which are essential for human survival. Unfortunately, the human population has grown so dramatically in the past several decades (from 2.8 billion in 1955 to 7.8 billion in 2020) that our current rates of resource utilisation far exceeds (has “overshot”) what the planet is capable of providing and renewing. Added to this is the fact that we have lost more species of plants and animals (which provide/renew these resources) in the last 65 years than we have in any other period of recorded history. **Earth Overshoot Day** marks that identified calendar date when humanity’s demand for ecological resources in a given year exceeds the planet’s capacity to regenerate those resources for that year. Once this day is reached, we then essentially start living in deficit because we are using ecological resources the planet has not yet had a chance to renew. At our current pace of resource utilisation, the planet’s ecosystems will be incapable of indefinitely sustaining future human generations. The year 1970 marked a significant turning point in our planet’s history. Before that, the planet’s ecological resources were sufficient enough, and the human population small enough, for sustainable living. However, since then, with increasing population growth and the subsequent decline in biodiversity, sustainable living has become an increasingly difficult prospect, forcing the Earth Overshoot Day, by an average of three days each year, ever closer to the start of the year. In 2019, Earth Overshoot Day fell on July 29. “Fortunately” (for the planet), the novel Coronavirus Pandemic has given us a reprieve and caused humanity’s ecological footprint to contract, pushing back the 2020 Earth Overshoot Day to August 22, giving humanity the equivalent of eight years’ worth of ecological resources. “However, true sustainability that allows all to thrive on Earth can only be achieved by design, not disaster.” It is estimated that it now takes the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to support humanity’s demand on nature. **But this does not even include the needs of the other species that co-inhabit this planet with us. So ... imagine if their needs were also taken into account ... how much closer to the start of the year Earth Overshoot Day really is.**

Rock Kestrel (*Kransvalk*, *Falco rupicolus*) hunting – Steve Peck, Napier Birding

Rock Kestrel hunting insects, in this case a Katydid (type of grasshopper) from a low pole near Napier. Most people think Kestrels only hunt and eat mice and small birds, but insects make up a considerable amount of their diet.



Blue Crane (*Bloukraanvoël*, *Anthropoides paradiseus*): revise global status?

The Blue Crane is South Africa’s national bird and a familiar presence in the Strandveld and Rûens. Currently the status of the Blue Crane is being reassessed as part of the 2021 Red List update. The Blue Crane is near-endemic to South Africa, with a small breeding population in northern Namibia. The stronghold of the species is the Western Cape in South Africa, holding about 52% of the population, followed by the Karoo, about 29% and the Grasslands, with about 14%. The disconnected population in Namibia is very small, numbering only 32 individuals (Namibia Crane Working Group 2018). The global population is thus tentatively placed in the band 25,500 to 48,000 individuals, which roughly equates to 16,000 to 32,000 mature individuals. Blue Cranes are facing a high number of threats, including direct and accidental poisoning and the loss of grassland habitat to afforestation, mining, agriculture and infrastructural development. A major cause of mortality is the collision with power lines. Large parts of the population are dependent on man-made agricultural landscapes and are therefore susceptible to future socio-economic, climatic or land-use changes. Despite the number and magnitude of threats to the species, the population has been increasing over the past two decades within its stronghold in the Western Cape. Blue Cranes are currently listed as Vulnerable. However, the current and recent status of the population indicates that both the size of the population and range exceed the thresholds for listing as threatened.

(SOURCE: <https://globally-threatened-bird-forums.birdlife.org/2020/09/blue-crane-anthropoides-paradiseus-revise-global-status>)

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



Encounter with Mr Kittlitz, the camouflage king – Wim de Klerk



It is Saturday morning and we are searching for the elusive Goliath Heron, when suddenly I have to swing to the right. I saw something suddenly moving in front of the Amarok and I barely caught sight of it. In those last few seconds I noticed a Kittlitz's Plover (Geelborsstrandkiewiet, *Charadrius pecuarius*) feverishly performing a strange dance on one spot before flying away, just in time. We stopped to look for what we thought could be a nest with eggs, but nothing.

Then I noticed something. In the bare landscape, the Kittlitz had laid eggs and as we approached it instinctively quickly covered it, in what one can only describe as the Kittlitz "riel dance". Neatly covered so that no egg is visible.



An European Honey Buzzard's amazing seasonal trek route

A female European Honey Buzzard (Wespedief, *Pernis apivorus*) was fitted with a satellite tracking system in Finland recently. It was of particular interest to locals because it spent the most recent austral summer around the town of Reitz in the Free State. She left Reitz to head north on April 20 and finally reached Finland on June 2. Of interest is the route she followed heading north. In just 42 days she covered 10 000km at an average of more than 230km per day. Note that she flew in a straight line north except when she had to fly over water or Sudan. She turned right at the source of the Nile and followed it. After this deviation she returned to the same longitudinal line she started on until she reached her destination. (Source unknown)



Fishermen beware - Wim de Klerk

Most fishermen will tell you they know that their fishing line could have unintentional results in killing birds who scavenge. Recently this White-breasted Cormorant (Witborsduiker, *Phalacrocorax carbo*) was seen strangled to death near Zeekoeivlei, Agulhas Plain. It is likely that it took live bait from a fisherman at De Mond nearby. If you see a Cormorant feeding near your fishing spot, be aware! Cormorants feed on fish and can stay under water for as long as 82 seconds and can dive at speeds of 0,86 to 4m per second! It is said that Cormorants that feed in salt water, swallow stones to decrease buoyancy.



SANParks Agulhas National Park Week

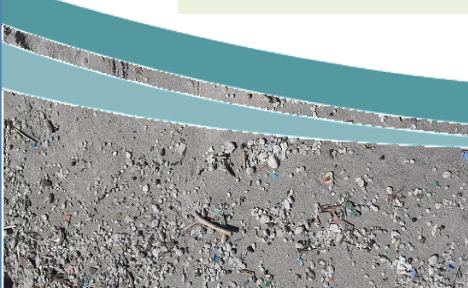
The 2020 Park Week celebration will be held at the Soutbosch farmstead from 16 to 20 November. Soutbosch is situated on the Struisbaai to Elim gravel road, off the R319 and R43 tarred roads. The programme consists of walking, birding, cycling and canoeing on the Nuwejaars River. Visitors must bring their own canoes and life-jackets. A special lime-washing activity is planned and visitors will be invited to take part. Visitors can also bring their own picnic lunch. Coffee, tea and light refreshments will be on sale. The normal Covid-19 regulations are applicable. For more information contact Emmerentia De Kock at 028-4356249/6078 or Reception at 028-4356078 between 08:00 and 16:00.



Lime-washing old historical houses

Elim people have for years practised the ritual of lime-washing their houses every year, just before Easter, with the preparation of the lime two weeks before Easter. The process to prepare the lime is described in Afrikaans as "die insuur van die kalk". The lime (pieces or stones) was placed in a metal container, filled to half level with water, stirred and heated to boil. Coarse salt was then added, as well as tallow or boiled linseed oil. The mixture is boiled again while stirring well. The container is filled up with water when the slaking is completed. The walls to be lime-washed must be prepared by wetting them for three consecutive days and immediately before the lime-washing starts. Three coats of lime wash are applied, with at least one day between coats. The lime-wash must be kept damp for at least three days after application with a light spray of water. The walls of the Soutbosch farmstead will be lime-washed during Park Week and the public will be invited to take part in this activity.

Nurdles are lentil-sized raw plastic pellets. They float, attract toxins and are mistaken by animals as food



**Nurdle
ALERT**
PLEASE HELP TO KEEP
OUR BEACHES CLEAN!



The Cape Honey Bee: nature's miracle worker – Richard Penwill, the Bee-keeper continues



The Cape Honey bees live together in clean, well-ordered colonies that can number as many as 50,000 individuals. The colony has three types of mature individuals: one active queen which can lay as many as 2,000 eggs every day, relative handfuls of male bees called 'drones' and, by far the greatest number, consist of thousands of 'worker bees' who are all female – although typically not fertile. When a colony is successful with a burgeoning population, it will split or "hive-off" and form another independent colony elsewhere.

This is how bee populations expand. Typically, a new queen will be raised in anticipation of this "hiving-off" and the old queen will fly off with an army of younger workers leaving the new queen in the old hive with the older team members. Ordinarily, a worker bee's lifespan is about 30 days (depending partly on the season of the year) whereas a queen can live productively for up to five years. On becoming "queen" a queen-bee will make a "maiden flight" and mate with a number of different drones from other colonies (which die after mating – or even if they survive, are banished from their hive as having served their purpose). The queen's short and frenzied flight permanently concludes her romantic life; thereafter she will be equipped to produce the hundreds of thousands of offspring that she will have during the course of her life. Of course, the result is that all the progeny from a particular queen are half-sisters and brothers. Apart from drones, whose only purpose is to be able to mate with the queen of another colony (not their own), bees are extremely hard-working. Moreover, they have a clear division of labour within their colonies. Most often a worker bee will perform a succession of jobs during her very short life. During its early days (quite literally from three to 14 days) she may be a nurse bringing food to the larvae of hatched eggs. Thereafter, she may be on foraging duty fetching pollen or nectar from flower to hive. She might then be on wax-making duty making wax-comb for storing the eggs (brood), pollen and honey. She might then move on to honey-making duty and then perhaps cleaning duty – for the hives are kept scrupulously clean. The short life-span and high birth-rate leads quite naturally to a correspondingly high death rate. The typical colony will have a constant detachment of worker bees on funeral service duty. They will carry a dead bee out of the hive immediately and, some days' later when that bee's body has dried out and it is light enough, an undertaker bee will pick it up, airlifting it well away from the colony before dropping it. This minimises the risk of rotting corpses contaminating the colony. Another detachment of older worker-bees will be on constant guard duty. They stay at the entrance to their hive and are quick to respond to any incursion from strangers. Apart from the drones, all bees are armed with a "stinger". They die after using it. Bees are prey to some birds (the Drongo is our local bee-eater) and their hives are a delicacy for the Honey Badger. Despite its *Honey Badger* name, it is in fact as keen on the brood that is found in the combs which is completely devoured and destroyed.

The Overberg Eco Rangers (OER) – Ian Fortuin

The Overberg Eco Rangers, a non-profit organisation, developed from the Agulhas National Park's Junior Ranger programme due to a need identified by the founding directors and others. The aim is to nurture awareness of the environment for 10 rangers (high school learners) and the broader community. The Sandberg Fynbos Reserve near Elim and a classroom at Albert Myburgh Secondary School in Bredasdorp serve as their Headquarters. Nature conservation, recycling, environmental awareness, culture and heritage, biodiversity, medicinal fynbos and soil regeneration are some of the topics covered. The 10 rangers, directors and volunteers cleared alien vegetation and planted more than 200 medicinal Fynbos (more than 37 species) at the Sandberg site while learning about Cape Fynbos at the same time. A prototype Khoe hut is being built while teaching people about the life and culture of the Khoe people. The dome structure of the hut tells a story of its own. A waterway, one of the sources of the Nuwejaars River, was cleared and the importance of spring water and water in the eco system was explained at the same time. A plastic tank was erected to supply water to the site. An Edu Centre (12m x 9m) is planned which will serve as a base for activities and programmes. Poles were obtained from ESKOM and the walls will be constructed with various re-usable materials (eco-bricks, glass bottles, wood from old fruit bins and stone). Removed alien trees (myrtle, pine and acacia species) were burned into bio-char. Alien trees will eventually be replaced by indigenous trees. Qhubeca donated 15 bicycles to increase mobility in OER's endeavours, enhance fitness and just for the enjoyment. Overberg Birdlife and Dr Wim de Klerk (Agulhas Plain Birding Project Coordinator) donated bird guides to help with bird identification and understanding the ecosystem and eco-web.



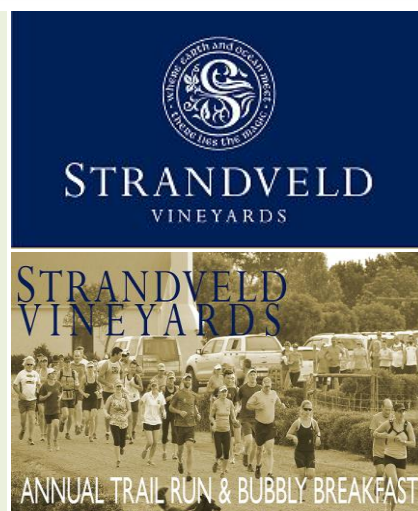
Guns on the Overberg shores – Jimmy Herbert

The iron cannons as a possible source of firepower was mentioned in governing circles from time to time. In May 1735, the need for salvaged cannon was first expressed. A decision was made to send qualified people to search the area where the **Schonenberg** (1722) was lost for any fully-functional guns. The orders were to examine the **Schonenberg** site and other wrecks that sank earlier further along the coast. Two months later it was recorded that no cannons were found along the beaches or in private ownership at local farms. Seventy years later, another mention is made of different shipwrecked guns lying along the coast. After two years, in January 1794, a Mr Brandt informed the Cape government of cannons found perched on the Zoetendaals Valley beach. According to him, although often entirely or partially covered by sand, these guns could be salvaged. They believed that these ordnances were more than likely from the VOC shipwrecks **Schonenberg** and the **Meermin** (1766). Orders were given for an Artillery Officer to go there, have the guns dug out and assessed, according to their condition and calibre. If still usable, they were to be brought back to the Castle. No success was reported. However, three months later, Baas Theunissen and Burger W. Otto of the Overberg brought for sale 12 iron cannons from the wrecks of **La Jardiniere** (1791) lying near the Zoetendaals Valley. An Artillery Officer examined them and cleared them for use. With a total weight of 20,000lb, these 12 iron cannons, consisting of two 8-pounders and ten 6-pounders, were purchased for 750 Rijksdaalders. According to the Overberg's historical (archives) and archaeological records (underwater finds), most of the cannons accumulated over the years are still in the custody of the Overberg. Relatively few were removed and taken to the Cape, leaving our coast still abundant with iron ordinance. **Ours to cherish and protect.**



Strandveld Vineyards Trail Run and Méthode Cap Classique breakfast – Jackie Rabe

Join Strandveld Vineyards for their annual Strandveld Trail Run and Méthode Cap Classique breakfast on December 29, 2020. Enjoy a scenic 16km trail run through vineyards, fynbos and pastures along a jeep track onto the Sandberg with breathtaking views of the Agulhas Basin and wetlands, wheat fields and the surrounding coastline. There is also an 8km vineyard run/walk with a 4½ km shortcut for the slightly less fit and competitive. Afterwards enjoy a glass of the delightful Strandveld Skaamgesiggie Pinot Noir Brut MCC and a delicious, country breakfast. Pre-booking is essential as only a limited number of tickets are available for the bubbly breakfast. Additional tickets for the trail run only are available and include bubbly or juice at the finish line. Prizes will be awarded to the first three male and first three female finishers of the 16km. Contact jackie@strandveld.co.za or 028 482 1902 for more information and to book your ticket and to request a booking form. Costs for the Breakfast and Trail run is R220 per adult and R100 per child and for the Trail run and bubbly/juice R100 per adult and R50 per child.



Cape Agulhas Classic 2020

The Cape Agulhas Classic 2020 is organised as an "informal" event this year. The date is December 29 and the distances are 35km, 46km and 63km. The entry fee is R100 per cyclist. There will be no prizes, water points, medical officials or timekeepers. Each cyclist who finishes will receive a medal. The routes will be more or less the same as last year. For more information visit www.capeagulhasmtb.co.za, facebook: [capeagulhasmtb](https://www.facebook.com/capeagulhasmtb) or contact admin@capeagulhasmtb.co.za.



Buchu at the Saltpans October 2020