



DECEMBER eBULLETIN

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Warmest wishes for a happy holiday season and a wonderful new year from all of us at the Agulhas National Park!

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOUTHERNMOST TIP OF AFRICA S34°49'59" E20°00'12"

The navigators of the 1400s to the 1700s who discovered the sea route around the southernmost tip, observed the sun at noon when it passed the meridian, and found that the magnetic compass pointed to true north. Today it points some 24 degrees west of true north.

The marine flora includes at least nine seaweed species of the Cool Temperate Southwest Coast province that are common between Cape Point and Cape Agulhas, but rare or absent just east, from the De Hoop Nature Reserve.



AGULHAS NATIONAL PARK RESTCAMP NEWS

Agulhas National Park Rest camp, as the southernmost and newest rest camp in the South African National Parks collection, will be opened officially on 7th December 2010, by SANParks CE Dr David Mabunda. He will be accompanied by senior SANParks officials and the Cape Cluster Area Manager, Mr Gary De Kock. Reservations to the restcamp are done through central reservations in Groenkloof at:

Tel: +27 (0)12 428 9111
Email: reservations@sanparks.org
www: www.sanparks.org

For more information please contact Derick Strydom at 028-4356078.

LIGHTHOUSE PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT



The Lighthouse Precinct Development is in an advanced stage and will be completed in two separate phases. Phase one is terrain development, i.e. civil works and provision of services. This phase also entails moving the navigation component of Transnet National Ports Authority and the construction of the relative buildings. Phase two is the construction of the buildings.

The restoration planning of the Lighthouse itself, managed by Transnet, is on course and any further developments in this regard will be aired in the future Newsletters.

FAUNA



Perlemoen Abalone *Haliotis midae* - Mbulelo Dopolo, Marine Program Manager, Cape Research Centre: Scientific Services

Wild perlemoen is the most highly valued marine resource in South Africa because of its exceptionally high demand in South East Asia, which is the destination for more than 95% of South Africa's legally and illegally harvested abalone. The continued economic boom in China is pushing the demand for wild abalone even higher. In addition, what is considered a shortfall by the state to issue fishing rights and conduct effective sea-based compliance, combined with the incentives to fish abalone (high price, low cost, ease of access) has created fertile ground for a full scale illegal abalone fishery in South Africa.

The increasing demand for abalone has been in contrast with the resource abundance (indexed from total allowable catch), which has declined from 600 tons during 1992/93 season to 75 tons in 2007/08 season when the fishery was officially closed. The decline in population has been attributed to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing; this compounded by the long period of time they take to reach sexual maturity (± 10 years). Despite the substantial decline in the overall population size, there are known areas where this sea snail still flourishes along the South African coastline, which need better management. The news of the abalone fishery closure was not well received by all in the fisheries, conservation and academics. The key concern was that the closure will inadvertently increase the demand for

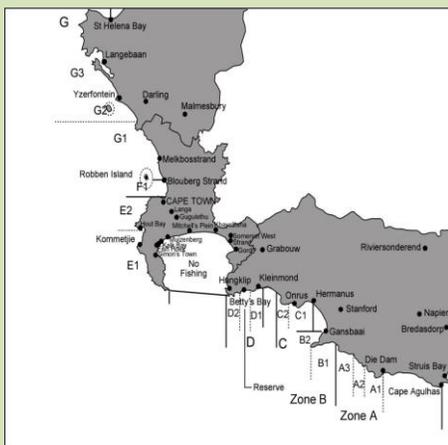
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wild abalone as the supply gets reduced, and subsequently fuel poaching, driving the species further toward commercial extinction.

In July 2010, the perlemoen fishery was reopened only for the commercial sector, and this season ended in October 2010. Subsequently, the abalone fishery will operate within its traditional timeframes; November – July each year. At the moment the TAC is at 150 tons per year with 303 right holders. The minimum size limit still stands at 114 mm, but right holders currently have an exemption to dive in dive ban areas. In terms of the different management areas, there are seven zones named alphabetically from A to G; but only those areas with viable populations were opened; e.g. Zones C and D are closed because the population in these management areas are considered not viable for harvesting. Note: zones A, E and G are adjacent to Agulhas, Table Mountain, and West Coast National Parks, respectively.



Galjoen, *Dichistius capensis*

Spawning season: October to March
Length at 50% sexual maturity (geslagsrypheid): Males 31 cm TL, Females 34 cm TL
Age at 50% sexual maturity (geslagsrypheid): Males and females reach maturity in their sixth year
Maximum age (lewensverwagtinge): 20 years
Length at first capture: 35 cm TL (~5-6 years)
Closed season: 15 October to 28 February
Status: Protected species, National fish of South Africa
SASSI status: Red (Not for sale)
Origin of name: *Galjoen*, a Dutch word for a galley which refers to the Galjoen's instinct to fight back when caught.



FLORA

New coralline algal species

An encrusting coralline red algal (calcified red seaweed) species that is new to science has recently been found along the Struisbaai and L'Agulhas coasts by Prof Gavin W. Maneveldt from the Department of Biodiversity & Conservation Biology at the University of Western Cape. The new species was found at the low-water mark of spring tide in sandy gullies that are channelled by rugged rocky outcrops. It occurs on small, round pebbles and has a very characteristic cherry-red colour and warty appearance. Research and identification are

almost complete; the alga must still be named. Prof Maneveldt and his team are looking at the words "Agulhas" and "cherry-red" to name this new marine plant. The formal description of the new species should be submitted for publication before the end of December this year.



***Encephalartos* spp**

Common Name: Broodboom, Cycad
Status: faces extinction

Arrie Scrieber, Environmental Crime Investigations, Conservation Services, South African National Parks

The cycad, which is the world's oldest living seed plant and has outlived the dinosaurs, faces extinction if people continue to wrench the plants from their wild habitats and plant them in gardens, said the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on 27 October 2010.

In an address to delegates at the Biodiversity Convention in Japan, the IUCN said that cycads were the most threatened group of organisms to have been assessed by them so far.

The global conservation assessment of 308 cycad species shows that their status has declined from 53% threatened in 2003 to 62% threatened in 2010.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute said the country was one of the world centers of cycad diversity with 39 species.

"It is also one of the hotspots for threatened cycads with 68% of SA's cycads threatened with extinction compared to the global average of 62%." – Sapa.

Shipwreck Hiking Trail

What's in a Name – from Patron Saints to Compass Needles
 Jason Menzies, FGASA Level 2 Field Guide

The "Shipwreck Trail" takes the traveller on a trip into the past to places where many vessels met their end on the rocky shores of the southernmost tip of Africa, Cape Agulhas. One of the many exciting things about this outcrop of Africa is how place names in the region are a product of maritime history and scientific discovery.

Take for instance the origin of "Agulhas", from which the "Agulhas National Park" takes its name, where the hiking element of this tour occurs. It was first christened "Cabo de Sao Brandao" by Bartholomeu Dias in 1488, in honour of "Saint Brendan the Navigator" (the patron saint of sailors). Saint Brendan was canonised for his 7 year voyage of discovery from Ireland, during which he sailed to Newfoundland and, some speculate, to America (500 years before Leif Ericson the Viking and almost a 1000 years before Christopher Columbus discovered the "New World" in 1492).

Cape St. Brendan was later christened "Golfo de Agulhas" (meaning "Gulf of Needles") by Portuguese navigators passing this cape in 1502.

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These sailors noticed that their compass needles pointed true north, with no magnetic declination. Bearing in mind that people of this era still thought the earth was the centre of all creation; this phenomenon would have caused the utmost alarm amongst mariners, some of whom still believed the earth to be flat!

More recently, results at the Hermanus Magnetic Observatory (one of only 12 in the world responsible for monitoring the earth's magnetic field), show South Africa to be magnetically unstable due to activity below the continental crust which is a precursor to polarity reversal! The iron content found in many global geological formations verify that this has indeed taken place before, the last known geomagnetic reversal being 780 000 years ago.

It is this forgotten yet prescient name change that led sailors during their voyages from Europe to the Far East to monitor, record and update magnetic variations on their charts for future travellers rounding this portentous cape, thus making the treacherous passage a bit safer.

One certain outcome of another polarity reversal is that all modern day navigation tools will become redundant. We will all have to revert to using the stars and saints as well as new compass needles for guidance, as our ancestors did.

If you would like to learn more about the fascinating Agulhas region, then follow the route of the castaways on the "Shipwreck Trail" with AWOL tours. Please email us on info@awol.travel to obtain more information.



RASPERPUNT HIKING TRAIL



The southern part of Africa holds a particular charm for both residents and visitors to the southernmost tip of the continent. The Rasperpunt Hiking Trail is a circular route where this can be experienced. The name is linked to a prominent landmark, the Rasperpunt fish traps, which are well known to

present day fishermen and the fishermen of old. This special landmark can be seen clearly at low tide. The trail traverses along the coast, through limestone fynbos unique to this area, and up onto the mountain ridge. The type of fynbos found here is under serious threat and requires conservation. About 110 species are endemic and found only on the limestone formations and 29 of these are classified rare or threatened.

The unicircular route of 5,45km has been laid out in such a way that it is followed in one direction only. The route starts and ends at the Meisho Maru shipwreck between the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse and Suiderstrand. Comfortable shoes can be worn for this leisurely walk of less than 3 hours. The route consists of sand, stones and steep inclines. To climb to the top of the mountain ridge requires a

reasonable degree of fitness and hikers should be medically fit for hiking.

There are 34 points of interest on the route described in a booklet which is available at the Cape Agulhas Tourism office in L'Agulhas. For more information contact the Tourism office at 028 435 7185.

Agulhas Sasol Stretton's Birding Weekend consolidated list of birds

Dr Anton Odendaal

I was asked to consolidate the lists of the birds claimed to have been seen by the various groups participating in the Birding Weekend of 6 to 7 November 2010 in Agulhas National Park and neighbouring Nuwejaars Special Management Area. In total 162 species were seen by participants and of these 28 were southern African endemics and 16 were near-endemics. This once again illustrates the vast birding potential of the "deep south".

The variety of habitats on offer in the Agulhas region allows birders visiting the area to see a great diversity of bird species. The coastal habitats at places such as Brandfontein, Agulhas Restcamp, Suiderstrand, L'Agulhas, Struisbaai and De Mond Nature Reserve produced species such as the Cape Cormorant, the two gulls found in the region, African Black Oystercatcher and African Penguin. The prize bird here was certainly Damara Tern. Add to this the wetlands along the Nuwejaars- and Heuningnes Rivers, Soetendalsvlei and the De Mond estuary and a range of waders came into play. These include Common, Curlew and Marsh Sandpiper, African Snipe and Caspian Tern. Other interesting water birds seen were African Purple Swamphen, Cape Shoveler, SA Shelduck, Purple Heron and Southern Pochard. Voëlvlei further produced Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Kittlitz's and Chestnut-banded Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey and Common Ringed Plovers and Ruff.

But what about terrestrial species? The prize bird here is Agulhas Long-billed Lark and most of the participants in the weekend were able to pick up on it – a lifer for many. Other LBJs included all of the region's Cisticolas and Red-capped and Large-billed Lark. Several species that would normally be associated with southern Africa in general and Cape in particular were also added – Cape Canary, Protea Seedeater, Cape Sugarbird, Cape Siskin, Southern Tchagra, Black Harrier and Cape Longclaw. Other endemics or near-endemics seen included Acacia Pied Barbet, Lark-like Bunting, White-throated Canary, Cloud and Grey-backed Cisticolas, White-backed Mousebird and Southern Double-collared Sunbird. An out of range Black-headed Canary caused great excitement!

The coastal thickets produced Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Boubou, surprisingly a Forest Canary, Long-billed Crombec, and African Dusky Flycatcher. Larger terrestrial species seen included Blue Crane, Common Ostrich, Denham's Bustard, Southern Black Korhaan and Secretarybird. A Burchell's Courser seen by Sylvia Ledgard and friend also caused a major stir.

As far as birds of prey are concerned participants reported Forest, Jackal and Steppe Buzzards, African Fish-eagle, African Marsh-

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harrier, Black Harrier, Rock Kestrel, Yellow-billed Kite and Secretary Bird.

A comprehensive overview of the birds seen during the weekend still have to be written. This brief report however clearly illustrates how underrated the greater Agulhas region is for birds and birding. It is hoped that the production of the new birding brochure for the Overberg (sponsored by Tru-Cape) will further highlight the birding delights of the area. The staff of the Agulhas National Park and particularly the Honorary Rangers and sponsors, SASOL and Stretton's Gin, need to be congratulated with another great effort – may you continue to expose the birding public to this wonderful destination.



International Year of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is our Future

Give a thought to what people can do to protect biodiversity – lifestyle choices, policy changes.

Life at the margins of the continents

An examination of the intertidal marine life of the southwestern Cape

Gavin W. Maneveldt, Department of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, University of the Western Cape

Imagine surviving in an environment that is neither truly marine nor truly terrestrial. That area just beyond the low-water mark of neap tides along the seashore is an example of just such an environment. The organisms living here have to cope with the combined extremes of both land and sea environments: salt spray, immersion in salt water, emersion in air, drenching by heavy rainfall, heating by the sun, freezing winter temperatures, unstable substrates (such as sand, gravel or boulders), and exposure to strong winds. Just how do they cope? Animals generally find it easier coping in this harsh environment because among other ways, they can simply get up and move when the going gets too tough. Plants (both terrestrial and marine) on the other hand, have to either tolerate, or succumb to it.

In a series of articles Prof Maneveldt will tell us about the astonishing ways in which both plants and animals from a typical southwestern Cape shore have evolved to adapt and cope in the harsh environment of the intertidal zone.

New 'fynbos-to-forest' trail launches on Agulhas Plain

Heather D'Alton, Flower Valley Conservation Trust

A spectacular new walking trail – which takes walkers from fynbos covered hills into a milkwood forest to a hidden waterfall – launches in December near Gansbaai. The recently renovated Witvoetskloof farmstead will offer accommodation from 10 December. The Witvoetskloof upgrade is a joint venture between Flower Valley Conservation Trust and Grootbos while the trail is part of a joint initiative with other members of the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy.

Witvoetskloof is a 780 hectare farm, which borders Flower Valley Farm on the Agulhas Plain. Visitors to the farm will be able to mountain bike on the farm, swim and fish in the dam, and take the circular forest walk. The highlight of this trail is a lovely waterfall.

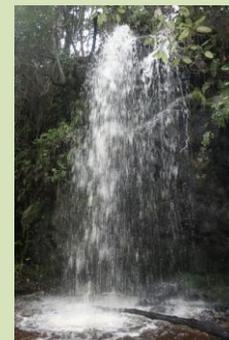
The main farmhouse has recently been renovated. It can accommodate 12 visitors, at R250 a night (with a minimum charge of R1500). The self-catering house will be fully equipped with bedding, cutlery, crockery and towels. More accommodation will become available from March next year.

According to Grootbos's Sean Privett, Witvoetskloof is perfect for both local residents and tourists to the area. "The farm is a private nature reserve – so the setting is beautiful, from the rare fynbos, to the secretive forests. It's perfect for a family holiday."

From mid-January, a three-day hiking trail, which traverses three farms – Witvoetskloof, Flower Valley and Baviaansfontein - will also be launched. The trail starts at Grootbos, at the Growing the Future organic vegetable project. Hikers will be served fresh produce from the garden, before starting out on the first section of the 25km trail. On the first day, which is seven kilometres long, hikers head through the ancient Steynsbos Milkwood forest, and past the Witvoetskloof fresh water spring. The first night is spent at Witvoetskloof farm.

The second day sees hikers head through an afro-montane forest (which includes Assegai and Stinkwood trees), past the Witvoetskloof waterfall, and then over the Ben Lomond peak, with its amazing view of Flower Valley Farm, Lomond vineyards and dam and Dyer Island. Hikers are offered lunch and a tour at Flower Valley Farm, before heading to the beautiful setting of Bhodi Khaya, a peaceful retreat renowned for its natural beauty and Labyrinth.

The third day is only six kilometers long, and takes hikers up the valley through four indigenous forests and through limestone and dune fynbos, to finish back at Grootbos and the Green Futures horticulture and life skills college.



More information on Witvoetskloof's accommodation and the launch of the hiking trail will be available at the Flower Valley music festival in the fynbos. The festival takes place on the Flower Valley Farm on Saturday 11 December, and offers the best local music and a host of other activities such as horse riding, quad biking and an educational fynbos hike.

For more information on Witvoetskloof, contact sean@grootbos.co.za. For more detail on Flower Valley's music festival in the fynbos, contact riana@flowervalley.co.za.

EVENTS

December

December	
1	Aids Awareness Day
11	Music Festival in Fynbos - Flower Valley

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