



FEBRUARY eBULLETIN

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The Agulhas Rest Camp occupation steadily growing



Since the official launch and opening of the Agulhas Rest Camp on December 7th 2010 by Dr D Mabunda, CE of South African National Parks, the rest camp has attracted a slow but steady number of guests. It is anticipated that Agulhas Rest Camp will become a very popular tourist destination in the foreseeable future. The rest camp consists of four two-bed units and four four-bed units. The four bed units comprise two separate bedrooms each with own bathroom (shower and toilet) en-suite. Located in the greater rest camp area is also Lagoon House (*commonly referred to as Pietie se Huis*). This four bedroomed historic house has been carefully restored and, with the sea comprising about three-quarters (270°) of the vista from this house, and its outstanding location, has become very popular amongst visitors. All accommodation within the rest camp is self catering.

For more information on the Rest Camp go to

- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/>
- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/tourism/accommodation.php>
- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/tourism/activities.php>
- http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/tourism/get_there.php
- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/tourism/general.php>
- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/groups/disabilities.php/>
- <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/initiatives/biodiversity.php>

Historic houses ready for occupation Rhenosterkop



Rhenosterkop is one of the oldest farms in the Strandveld and was established together with Springfield in 1742. Matthys (Rostok) Johannes Lourens (Lorenz) received grazing rights at "Renosterkop at Soetendaalsvalley on the Buffeljagtsrivier" on 21/2/1757. In 1836 the Cape Government registered the land formally in the name of Matthys Lourens. SANParks bought Portion 285 of the bigger Rhenosterkop in



2002. The farmstead consists of five typical Strandveld buildings built according to the typical local vernacular style. The oldest house probably dates back to the middle of the 18th century and the youngest to 1939/40. It is situated to the north of the Agulhas dunefield on the Agulhas Plain, and can be found down the Brandfontein Road which branches off from the Struisbaai/Elim road. Renosterkop is 31km from the Park's offices in L'Agulhas. It is self catering and comprises three units with 10 beds in total. One of the units is equipped for disabled persons. Guests staying in Rhenosterkop will be able to hike, bird, visit Springfield Estate, Elim village, the Shipwreck Museum in Bredasdorp, the Lighthouse Museum in L'Agulhas, the Hotagterklip Padstal in Struisbaai, swim and fish at Brandfontein and Struisbaai. Wine-tasting is offered at the nearby wine-cellar on the Elim Wine Route and visitors have the choice of a large selection of restaurants at which to dine in the Strandveld.



Southern Tip Day

Southern Tip Day, 16 May, is an initiative by Agulhas National Park to commemorate the history of the southernmost tip of the African continent and the impact of shipping and shipwrecks on the Strandveld area. It also commemorates Bartolomeu Dias's sea voyage round the southern tip of Africa in 1488 and all the shipwreck victims who have lost their lives along the Cape Agulhas coastline. It is ironic that Bartolomeu Dias lost his life on 12 May 1500 to the east of the Cape when he was part of Cabral's fleet during a sudden storm. This tragedy is also the first recorded foundering of a ship on the Cape coast. To commemorate these events and to celebrate the lives that were lost during the early years of sailing around the southernmost tip of Africa, various activities such as southern tip talks, exhibitions, food and drink events, sailing around the southern tip and various other activities are organized.

One of these activities that is organized for 2011 is the Southern Tip Soetendaalsvlei Relay Race, consisting of canoeing, running and mountain biking. Participants put together their own team comprising a paddler, mountain biker and runner. Entry fees are R150,00 per team; interesting prizes and spot prizes are to be won, and the participants





are given the opportunity to experience unknown conservation areas at the Southernmost Tip of Africa. For more information please contact Giel De Kock, 028 435 6078 (Mon to Fri, 8h00 to 16h00).

Shipwrecks along the Cape Agulhas Coastline

Passing the Agulhas Bank was the most dangerous passage of the voyage between Europe and India during the early years of sailing around the southernmost tip of Africa and the Eastern sea trade of the Europeans. The Agulhas Bank became the graveyard of mariners and the Cape Agulhas coastline the coast of shipwrecks. (Burrows, 1994)

SS ALCESTIS

“(British steel screw ship, 1850 tons, built in 1890), en route from Glasgow to Mauritius; cargo: government stores, explosives and railway material; struck a sunken wreck and sank 2,5 km off Brandfontein, 28/02/1895.” (Eastern Province Herald, 2/03/1892; Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1891-92)

BARBARA GORDON

“(British wooden barque, 338 tons, built in 1836), en route from Adelaide to Swansea and London; cargo: 338 tons of copper ore and 181 bales of wool; wrecked on a reef east of Ratel River, 5/05/1853; 6 survivors and a few crew members, 5 passengers and one crew member survived.” (Cape Town Mail, 14, 17/05/1853; Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1853-54; Shipping Register, Cape Archives, C.C. 2/18)

GRACE

“(British vessel, 250 tons, built in 1811), en route from Port Jackson to London; cargo: wool and grain oil; wrecked near Ratel River after catching fire and abandoned on 4/6/1822; no lives were lost.” (Cape archives, C.O. 2640 No 53)

DONCASTER

“(British barque, 235 tons, built 1825), en route from Mauritius to London; cargo: troops and passengers; wrecked about 21 km west of Cape Agulhas and about 1 km in extent near the Ratel River (mouth of Ratel River), 17/07/1836; no survivors; 38 bodies of men, women and children were buried after being found on the beach.” (Cape of Good Hope Govern. Gazette, 5/08, 2/09/1836; Grahamstown Journal, 18/08/1836; Lloyds Register of Shipping, 1836-37; SA Commercial Advertiser, 27/08/1836)



For more information on shipwrecks:

BURROWS, Edmund H. 1994. Overberg Odyssey: People, Roads & Early Days. Swellendam Trust.

TURNER, M. 1988. Shipwrecks and salvage in South Africa – 1505 to the present. Cape Town: C. Struik.

FLORA

Limestone conebush, *Leucadendron meridianum*

Endemic to limestone ridges. The young plant is covered with fine silver hairs which protect it from the salty sea air. The colder the winter, the brighter the plants become, creating a striking show. The cones of the female plant are bigger than the male cones. This plant can be spotted along the Struisbaai/Bredasdorp road on Zoetendals Valleiland.



International Year of Forests

Forest and Thickets on the Agulhas Plain – Mick D’Alton, 2008

Forest and thickets only cover a very small area on the Agulhas Plain with remnants of indigenous forest still found in the deep kloofs on the slopes of the Bredasdorp mountains while some white milkwood (*Sideroxylon inerme*) patches that still occur in the area could be classed as low forest. Low thicket forms the majority of this poorly represented veld type where *Carissa bispinosa* “num-num”, *Pterocelastrus tricuspidatus* “kershout”, *Maytenus heterophylla* “pendoring”, *Euclea racemosa* “seeguarrie”, and *Olea exasperata* and *O. capensis* “wilde-olyfboom” are commonly found. It is not clear how abundant it was before the influence of humans with their need for firewood and for constructing their dwellings as well as their habit of burning veld for grazing, but it is certain that only a small percentage of this very important component of the biodiversity of the area remains. These forests and thickets have a high natural fire resistance but the alien invasion has engulfed and destroyed a great deal of them when it inevitably burns. Should we be successful in reducing the aliens appreciably then we must urgently find a way of promoting the re-growth of these thickets so that they may fulfil their original function in the natural system.



Strandveld Tree of the month



Swartolienhout
Wild olive

Olea europaea subsp. *Africana*





WETLANDS



World Wetlands day, 2nd February

The theme for 2011 is **Wetlands and forests: Forests for water and wetlands**. World Wetlands Day was first celebrated in 1997. It marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. World Wetlands Day aims to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits and promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

The Nuwejaars Wetland system

The Nuwejaars Wetland system is an area of immense diversity and conservation value. It consists of rare and endemic natural fynbos and wetlands, which are all interlinked by the streams and rivers of the Nuwejaars wetland ecosystem. This system drains the Southern Agulhas Plain forming a number of annual and permanent water bodies or *vleis*, the most notable of which are Soetendalsvlei and Voëlvlei. These wetlands are inhabited by a large variety of avian and aquatic species, some of them extremely rare and endangered and some endemic to the area alone. The conservation value of the system is further enhanced as it ultimately feeds into the Heuningnes River which meets the sea at the De Mond Estuary – already listed as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The very low gradients in the south-eastern Plain result in significant wetland development, and create the second largest lacustrine wetland in South Africa – Soetendalsvlei. The Agulhas region is unique in terms of the wide variety of wetlands (freshwater springs, rivers, estuaries, lakes, vleis and endorheic pans) that occur within a relatively small area. (G. Cleaver, 2005?, M. D'Alton, 2007).

Agulhas Working for Wetlands 2011

Arnold Viegeland, Project Manager

In 2011 the Agulhas Wetland project will focus on the rehabilitation of the quaternary catchment of the Nuwejaars Wetland and Ratel River systems. This will comprise 270,4 m³ of gabions, earth structures of 597 m³, concrete structures of 131,55 m³, revegetation of 869 m³ and alien clearing of 124,83 m³. Four teams comprising 40 individuals in

total, from the surrounding communities, will be employed for the 2011/12 financial year.



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

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.

Flora

For terrestrial plants living on or near the seashore (we will call them maritime plants) the main problem is how to survive in a salty environment. A characteristic feature of many of these plants is succulence. Maritime plants have to store lots of fresh water in their tissues, as seawater is too salty for them to use directly, and they must store it whenever it is available. Such plants are often subjected to the desiccating effects of salt laden wind that deposit toxic salts on them. They get blasted by sea sand or buried in it, and are subjected to intense solar radiation both direct and reflected. To top it all, they grow in organically poor soils that have little water holding capacity.

Maritime plants use a variety of mechanisms to cope in this saline environment. Some can selectively control salt absorption at the root level. Others secrete excess salt via salt glands on the surfaces of leaves. Some, like glassworts and the *southbossie* *Chenolea diffusa*, concentrate salt in their tissues, diluting the salt by storing it in their succulent parts (they compartmentalize the salt in parts of the plant where high salt concentrations will not affect normal metabolism). Glassworts with their waterproof bodies are so tough they are one of the few flowering plants that can truly be said to live in salt water as many are covered by the sea at almost every high tide. Some glassworts can even tolerate salinity concentrations of up to 75 parts per 1000. Considering that the ocean is on average only about 33 parts per 1000, one can readily appreciate the resilience of these plants.

This environment is also a prime habitat for the establishment of lichens (composite organisms consisting of a symbiotic association of a fungus with an alga), which are able to survive extremes of heat, cold and drought. They are able to survive in this hostile environment because of their ability to dry out completely, shutting down their metabolism when conditions become too severe. It is also believed that their complex chemistry allows them to control light exposure, repel herbivores, kill attacking microbes and discourage competition from true plants. These are important adaptations for life in this marginal habitat. (To be continued).





Fauna



Kabeljou, Dusky kob, *Argyrosomus japonicus* (previously incorrectly identified as *Argyrosomus hololepidotus*)

Spawning season: October to January

Length at 50% sexual maturity (geslagsrypheid): 92 cm (males); 107 cm TL (females)

Age at 50% sexual maturity (geslagsrypheid): 5 years (males) and 6 years (females)

Maximum age (lewensverwagtinge): 42 years

Length at first capture: 40 cm TL (1,5 years)

Status: Open species

SASSI status: Orange

Origin of Name: *Kabeljou* and *Kob* come from the Dutch word *Kabeljauw*, the word for salted and dried fish.

Length at 50% sexual maturity refers to the length at which about 50% of the species population reach sexual maturity. **Length at first capture** refers to the minimal length at which the species could be harvested. This is similar to minimum size catch limit. (Cape Research office, Tokai)

To check the status of any fish, text its name to **079 499 8795**. (SASSI Consumer Seafood Pocket Guide, September 2010).

Afrikaanse Vleivalk, African Marsh-Harrier, *Circus ranivorus*

A large robust Harrier with rufous brown plumage and variable white flecking.

Category: Endangered

Population: 3 000-5 000

Main threats: Habitat loss and degradation of wetland habitats, particularly in the highveld of SA, suggests that the African Marsh Harrier may have declined by 20% in the last three generations, qualifying it as Endangered. The red data atlas has shown that the species' range has fragmented, and reporting rates are declining markedly in the Western Cape; it is considered locally extinct in Lesotho.



SOUTBOSCH OPEN DAY 5 FEBRUARY 2011



National Wetlands Day is celebrated all over South Africa on 2 February 2011. The theme for 2011 is Forests and Wetlands. As part of the celebrations Agulhas National Park and the Agulhas Honorary Rangers invite you to visit the Soutbosch werf which is situated on the edge of the Nuwejaars wetlands.

WHERE: Soutbosch, ± 8km from Struisbaai-Bredasdorp tar road
TIME: 9h00

FOR MORE INFO PLEASE CONTACT:

- Emmerentia De Kock, 028-4356078 (Mo-Fri, 8:00-16:00)
- Elaine Hodgson, 082 638 2041



Visit

www.capeagulhasmardigras.co.za

To read more about the Parade!

EVENTS

February	
2	World Wetlands Day
5	Soutbos Open Day
21	International Mother Language Day
April	
29 & 30	Cape Agulhas Mardi Gras
May	
13 - 15	Southern Tip Weekend
14	Southern Tip Soetendalsvlei Relay Race

