

Sharing the Earth With 1 TRILLION Species

islandconservation.org



AgulhasNPark eBulletin



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Protect our Species

www.sanparks.org

South African
NATIONAL PARKS

Earth Day 2019

Earth Day is celebrated every year on April 22. The theme for 2019 is **Protect our species**. Rachel Carson said in 1962 *"In nature, nothing exists alone."* Nature's gifts to our planet are the millions of species that we know and love, and many more that remain to be discovered. Unfortunately, human beings have irrevocably upset the balance of nature and, as a result, the world is facing the greatest rate of extinction since we lost the dinosaurs more than 60 million years ago. But unlike the fate of the dinosaurs, the rapid extinction of species in our world today is the result of human activity. The unprecedented global destruction and rapid reduction of plant and wildlife populations are directly linked to causes driven by human activity: climate change, deforestation, habitat loss, trafficking and poaching, unsustainable agriculture, pollution and pesticides to name a few. The impacts are far reaching. If we do not act now, extinction may be humanity's most enduring legacy. All living things have an intrinsic value, and each plays a unique role in the complex web of life. We must work together to protect endangered and threatened species: bees, coral reefs, elephants, giraffes, insects, whales and more. The good news is that the rate of extinctions can still be slowed, and many of our declining, threatened and endangered species can still recover if we work together now to build a united global movement of consumers, voters, educators, faith leaders, and scientists to demand immediate action. Earth Day Network is asking people to join the **Protect our Species** campaign. Visit <https://www.earthday.org/campaigns/endangered-species/earthday2019/> for more information on the goals of this campaign. (SOURCE: www.earthday.org)



Protect our species at the Southernmost Tip of Africa



Abalone
Perlemoen
Haliotis midiae



Angulate Tortoise
Rooipensskilpad
Chersina angulata



African Black Oystercatcher
Swarttobie
Haematopus moquini



Blue Crane
Bloukraanvoël
A paradiseus



Swartvlerkkorhaan
Southern Black Korhaan
Afrotis afra



Limestone Fynbos (critically endangered)



Witmelkhout, White Milkwood, *S inerme*



Connecting to Society

Secretarybird: Birdlife SA Bird of the Year 2019

The Secretarybird is often found in grasslands and open savannah. Found nowhere else on earth, the Secretarybird is the perfect nomination for Birdlife South Africa's Bird of the Year for 2019. As Bird of the Year the Secretarybird will be used to highlight the dramatic deterioration of Africa's raptor populations, while also raising awareness about several of the threats responsible for this decline. The biggest threat facing them and other large terrestrial birds is habitat loss. Development and transformation of natural environments into agricultural fields, plantations, mines and buildings make the areas unsuitable for open-habitat species, like the Secretarybird. For more information on the Bird of the Year, visit www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year. (SOURCE: *Safarinews*, Summer Edition 2018, issue 03)

Birdlife South Africa keeps a database of Secretarybird nest locations. If you find one please email info@birdlife.co.za.



The effect of the drought on birding in the Agulhas Plain – Wim De Klerk

The past three years has been some of the driest in past history – or was it? Understanding the effect of droughts requires an understanding of rainfall patterns. Average rainfall for the Agulhas Plain varies greatly from Northern (e.g. Kosierskraal) to the more central area (e.g. Seekoeivlei). There is a 25% lower average in the central plain of about 450mm/year compared to the northern plain (Northern area 600mm). Cyclical droughts seems to be normal when one looks at historical figures and from 1968 the plain indeed experienced below average rainfall for seven consecutive years until 1975! This means that bird species should be adapted to it and that diversity is unlikely to be effected by droughts. But what does the research show? Although anecdotally bird numbers decline during drought years, it seems as if species diversity is maintained. For the past three years we have regularly commented on the lower number seen during outings, but a comparison of two “wet” years (2014 and 2015) with two “dry” years (2017 and 2018) show that the number of species per year is not effected by drought directly. In 2017 the highest number of species in one year was recorded, despite it being a very dry year! This is a good result for birding enthusiasts as it shows that the Agulhas Plain remains an excellent birding destination even during dry years!



Spotted in the Agulhas Plain for the first time
African Wood Owl
Bosuil
Strix woodfordii
by Erica Brink

Twenty years on: how the Agulhas National Park has developed

2003

Rietfontein and Ratelrivier were bought adding the very important Ratel River wetlands and famous historical buildings. In November 2003 a planning process was started to implement a Working for Wetlands project within the Agulhas National Park. The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative commenced and the Overberg Honorary Ranger Region, now Agulhas Region, was established.



Rietfontein

Rietfontein aan Zandberg is one of the original and oldest Strandveld farms. Its history goes back to the 1740s when the first Europeans moved into the Strandveld. *Rietfontein aan Zandberg* was awarded to Petrus Arnoldus Gildenhuysen in the 1740s for animal husbandry. Matthys Rostock Lourens (*1708) received grazing rights on Rietfontein in 1755 and also used the farm as a loan farm. At the time he was already living on Zoetendals Vallei and used neighbouring Ratelrivier as a grazing area. Rietfontein was used for grazing for the different owners' flocks of sheep and never to plant crops. The managers ploughed small fields to sow grain for own use. Flowers were harvested in the late 20th century. Through the years a Lourens family member always lived on Rietfontein and *oom* Piet Lourens, the last inhabitant, lived on the farm for 52 years. In 1839 the Cape Government registered the land formally in the name of Dirk Gysbert Van Breda and from then on Rietfontein always had a strong historical connection with its neighbour, Ratelrivier. The Albertyn family bought the farm in 1917 and sold it to SANParks in 2003. The buildings sadly burnt down in 2003, but were restored in 2009. Unfortunately at the end of 2009 a devastating fire roared through the Park and Rietfontein *Langhuis* burnt down again. It was fully restored in 2011.



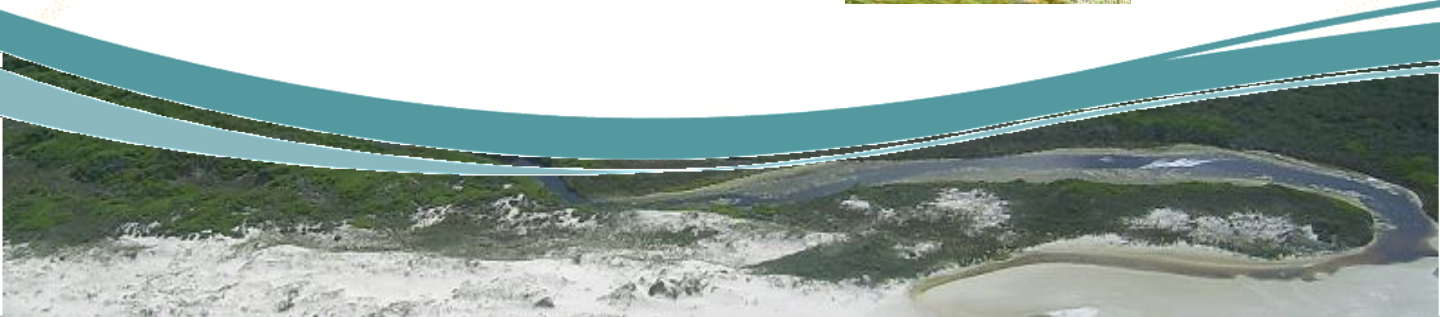
Ratelrivier

The history of Ratelrivier dates back to 1745 when Matthys Rostock Lourens (*1708) received a piece of land as a loan farm called *Buffeljagsrivier aan de Ratelrivier*. He was the first European to settle at Ratelrivier. In 1795 Johannes Jochemus Swart (1754-1778) obtained grazing rights and in 1831 Hans Jacob Swart (1786 – 1835) bought 1 875ha. He was the first freeholder (*eiendomsreg*). A quitrent grant diagram dated 16 June 1831 shows a well-established farm with a centrally-placed T-shaped homestead and outbuilding. This was most probably built by Lourens when he was living at Ratelrivier from 1745. (The foundations of this building were found where the 20th century milking shed was built near the vegetable garden). A 1938 aerial photograph shows a lopsided T-shaped structure. The first Van Breda to buy a section of the property was Dirk Gysbert Van Breda (1803-1887), son of Michiel Van Breda, in 1869. The main homestead was most probably built by the Van Bredas, a rectangular structure at first and added on over the years. The 1938 aerial photograph shows two rectangular structures alongside each other. Over the years the farmstead developed with the stables built in 1902 being the most famous, as well as four workers' houses. At the time the farm belonged to the FletcherFry family who turned it into a well-known horse breeding farm. After them followed Clive Corder (1946) and Lord De Saumerez (1949). SANParks bought the property in 2003.



The Ratel River wetlands system (river, vleis, pans, estuary)

The Ratel River rises to the west of Elim and flows into the sea via an extensive wetland about 6km east of Quoin Point, which can also be described as a storage floodplain. The catchment of the Ratel River is 405km² and the mean annual simulated runoff is $7.05 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$. Two endemic and highly endangered species, the **Cape platanna** (*Xenopus gilli*) and the **Micro frog** (*Microbatrachella capensis*) have been recorded in the Ratel River catchment. The Red Data listed Western **Leopard toad** (*Bufo pantherinus*) has a viable population in this area. The endemic, restricted and endangered **Southern Adder** *Bitis armata* occurs in the area. (SOURCE: The Agulhas National Park State of Knowledge, 2008)

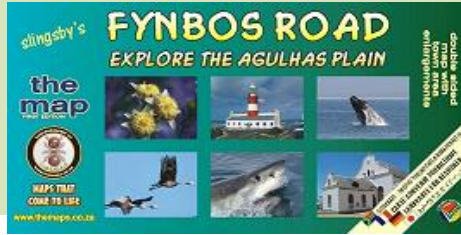


The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI)

The Agulhas Plain was identified as a conservation priority by SANParks in 1986. Recognising the importance of the area, a fine scale conservation mapping exercise was completed in 2000 as a part of the Cape Action for People and Environment (C.A.P.E.) process. In May 2000 SANParks entered into a strategic partnership with Fauna & Flora International and together they designed the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative project which was submitted to UNDP/GEF to obtain project preparation funds. In May 2003 the GEF Council approved the implementation of the ABI. Co-financing has been committed by SANParks, Cape Nature, FFI, Flower Valley Conservation Trust, WBFC and the local Overstrand and Cape Agulhas municipalities. The project was officially launched at the World Parks Congress in Durban in September 2003 where the grant agreement was signed between SANParks and UNDP/GEF. The implementation stage started in January 2004. The goal was Biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development on the Agulhas Plain, significantly enhanced through effective management and coordinated multi-sector stakeholder involvement. All the activities have thus been designed to mitigate threats to the lowland fynbos habitats and wetland environments of the Agulhas Plain. Project deliverables were conservation management at a landscape level (the establishment of the Nuwejaars Special Management Area), a programme for the sustainable harvesting of wild fynbos, nature-based tourism to benefit local communities (the Fynbos Road map: explore the Agulhas Plain) and building local support for biodiversity conservation.



Project Coordinator Tertius Carinus recording Bontebok being relocated in the Nuwejaars Special Management Area



2004

Portions 5 and 7 of Soutbosch 286 were bought and more wetlands were added. The Working for Wetlands project started officially in July 2004.



Working for Wetlands project

After the initial phase the official project business plan was approved on July 7, 2004 and the contracted teams started work on July 13, 2004 (Marthina Niemand from Elim) and on July 19, 2004 (Mary Gertruida Newman from Struisbaai). Norms and standards were developed on site to suit the prevailing conditions. The concepts of earth plugs and project deliverables had to be explained. Project management had to devise and design a contraption to make the concept of cubic metres understandable. In the end the teams knew exactly that 16 wheel barrows make a cubic metre. Earth plugs were put in every 50m within the drainage channels. Fixed point photography points were put up to monitor every three months. After 15 years the recovery of the wetlands around Soutbosch and Bosheuwel is remarkable and can be seen from the Elim gravel road.



Southern Tip Day programme

May 17: Southern Tip Meal, Agulhas Seafood, 19h00

May 18: L'Agulhas Main Road festival

By the community for the community: Walk, Run, Stalls, Art exhibitions, *kuier* at all the restaurants along the street, Strandveld wine tasting, Music, Birding. (For more information: E. De Kock, 028-4356078, 08:00 – 16:00)



April in Khoe *gama/ais* means "crooked fire", "krom vuur", hungry times.