



AgulhasNPark eBulletin



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"It's all about birds ..."

www.sanparks.org

The African Black Oystercatcher versus the Eurasian Oystercatcher

The African Black Oystercatcher, as indicated in the October eBulletin, is BirdLife South Africa's Bird of the Year. Recently there was some confusion between the Black Oystercatcher and the Eurasian Oystercatcher. The Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* is a very rare visitor to the Cape Agulhas shores. It is smaller than the endemic African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini* and is very distinctively black and white in colouring. The Black Oystercatcher is completely black. The Eurasian Oystercatcher occurs in southern Africa as non-breeding or immature. They are sometimes in the company of the Black Oystercatcher. (SOURCE: NEWMAN, K. 2002. *Newman's Birds of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Struik)



S. Brink

birdseye.photo



Birding Big Day (SA) ~ November 24

Every year in late November several teams register and compete in the Birding Big Day fun experience in the Agulhas Plain. Teams consist of a maximum of four birders and they record as many species as possible in a 24-hour period. You should be part of it! No experience needed! Just have fun! This year we will compete for the first time for the AGULHAS PLAIN BIG BIRDING DAY TROPHY! This floating trophy will be handed over to the team recording the most species in one day. You will need to download the free Birdlasser App and register online at: <http://birdlife.org.za/events/birding-big-day/bbd-2018-entry-form>. For information go to www.agulhasplainbirding.co.za, or <https://www.birdlife.org.za/events/birding-big-day> or contact Wim at: doc@agulhasplainbirding.co.za. 2018 is the 43rd year Birdlife South Africa is organising the annual Birding Big Day country wide.

Eight years into the Agulhas Plain Birding Project – Wim de Klerk.

The Agulhas Plain Birding project has now been running for eight years and what an experience it has been! In 2010 it was a one person show and the official Agulhas Plain Bird list was 146 species strong. Today the Agulhas Plain Birding Group is made up of interested parties from all spheres and the official Bird list stands at 268! So far, 209 full protocol cards have been submitted as data for the project. Despite this positive picture, 2018 was a bad year for the birds of the Agulhas Plain. The drought had a devastating effect on avi-tourism and with two months left of the year we only saw 40% of the previous year's visitors. Bird numbers are down as most of the pans have been dry all year and food sources erratic. Late winter rains, though, brought relief and we hope for an interesting last two months! Droughts are natural occurrences and it should be interesting to dissect the data and the effect of the drought once the project is completed at the end of 2019.



Inshore birds of the Agulhas Plain - Wim de Klerk

Inshore birds, for the purpose of this article, are pelagic species that feed and live on the oceans, almost never set foot on land, but sometimes can be seen from the shoreline. Three species, the Cape Gannet, the Arctic Tern (Arktiese sterretjie, *Sterna paradisaea*) and the African Penguin, are inshore birds in the Agulhas Plain that rarely come ashore, but breed on land elsewhere. Apart from the above, four more inshore species have been recorded from coastal pentads in the Plain: The Parasitic Jaeger (Arktiese roofmeeu, *Stercorarius parasiticus*), White-chinned Petrel (Bassiaan, *Procellaria aequinoctialis*), Subantarctic Skua (Bruinroofmeeu, *Catharacta antarctica*), and Northern Giant-Petrel (Grootnellie, *Macronectes hallii*). Where and how to look for inshore species? Wait for stormy weather with winds blowing from the ocean towards the coast which tends to push these species closer to the shore. Use a spotting scope or camera with a telephoto lens as identification is notoriously difficult. Or: Wait on the coast just south of Struisbaai harbour for the fishing trawlers to return! Inshore species follow these trawlers almost up to the time when they enter the harbour!



Parasitic Jaeger



White-chinned Petrel



bluecrane.org.za



projectvulture.org.za

Recording history of the Cape Vulture in the Agulhas Plain – Wim De Klerk

Between 2010 and 2012, after the Agulhas Plain birding project started, there were no records of Cape Vulture in the Agulhas Plain. Major alien vegetation clearing was then already in progress in the Agulhas National Park. At the end of 2009 a disastrous fire raged through the Park from the west, destroying three-quarters of the Park. In 2013 the first two sightings were recorded, in 2015 the third, in 2017 the 4th and in 2018 the fifth. A sixth Cape Vulture was also reported by Cape Nature at De Mond, but this could not be confirmed photographically! It appears the alien clearing after the big 2009 fire had opened up the natural habitat of the Cape Vulture. Most of the visiting Cape Vultures have been immature birds. Hopefully there will be an increase in visits in future!

Napier Birding – Steve Peck

Napier Birding started three years ago as a Facebook page to allow locals to showcase their photographs and help others identify birds they see in and around their gardens and in the region. It also offers guided birding tours around the wheat belt region, and has developed a website www.napierbirding.co.za.



Karoo Prinia



Burchell's Coucal

Birding moments



Cape Bulbul feeding its two weeks old young by Steve Peck



Streaky-headed Seedeater caught in the act by Cobus Elstadt



Black-headed Heron with its breakfast by Sharon Brink



Malachite Sunbird feeding on *L. bulbifera* nectar by Adrian Fortuin



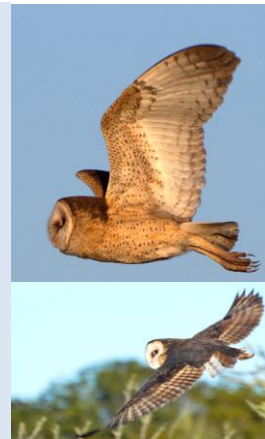
Kittlitz's Plover found herself a built enclosure for her nest by Louise Beeslaar

Bontebok National Park Honorary Rangers reported a successful first birding week-end from October 19 to 21. 27 birders attended and 123 species were recorded.



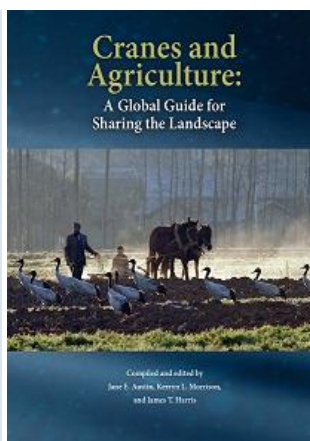
African Grass Owls – Alouise Lynch, Bionerds

The African Grass Owl (*Grasuil*, *Tyto capensis*) has experienced a 30% reduction in its regional population size over the past 10 years nationally. The pressure on this species has not abated, and it is listed as Vulnerable. African Grass Owls are habitat specialists that use grasslands throughout their distribution range. Although the species is listed as occurring in the Agulhas Plain, there is very little known about its distribution and ecology in this area. Anecdotal accounts of a breeding pair on the Agulhas Plain indicate that the birds have been breeding successfully since 2009. However, no information exists for where the young African Grass Owls may move within the landscape or whether the offspring are successful in breeding. Bionerds decided to launch the Agulhas Plain African Grass Owl Project. The focus area of the project is the Agulhas Plain-Heuningnes Estuary Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), which includes Agulhas National Park, De Mond Nature Reserve and the Nuwejaars Wetland SMA – partnering with all of these organizations as well as BirdLife South Africa. (To be continued)



"Cranes and Agriculture: Sharing the Landscape"

A guide for farmers and cranes to live together harmoniously is now available. The publication *Cranes and Agriculture: Sharing the Landscape* was recently completed. The publication was initiated at a Crane Specialist Group workshop in 2010 at Muraviovka Park in Russia, and further developed at a workshop in Beijing in 2012. This product far exceeded the early ideas and will be a great resource for stakeholders across the crane-agriculture interface. The publication is available free online at https://www.savingcranes.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/cranes_and_agriculture_web_2018.pdf. A limited number of printed copies of this 304-page publication also can be purchased for \$30 by preordering from Elena Smirenski (elena@savingcranes.org).



Most wanted species in the Agulhas Plain

So far, during the eight years it has been running, the Agulhas Plain Birding Project has delivered 268 species. Despite this impressive figure, some species that were expected to be in the area have eluded our binoculars! There are 33 bird species that, according to Roberts Birds of Southern Africa, should occur here, but have not been recorded, or have been recorded as vagrants by other birders and not confirmed by the project. Some of these species are more likely to be found and perhaps you can assist us with them! Please look for and report any of the following species: Cape Penduline-Tit, Cape Rock-jumper, Cape Siskin, European Bee-eater, Great Egret, Karoo Korhaan, Marsh Owl, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Sand Martin, White-backed Mousebird and White-winged Tern. Please report on the www.agulhasplainbirding.co.za website or phone 082 807 0904.

Canaries: Bird of the Month for November 2018 – Wim De Klerk

The Agulhas Plain has five Canary species that can be confusing at times! The reason for this is that their juveniles can look very similar. You distinguish between these species by habitat, number, bill and colour. The **Brimstone or Bully Canary** (Dikbekkanarie, *Serinus sulphuratus*) is almost always seen singly or in pairs on two to three meter high shrubs. They have a very large bill and are greenish yellow. Large numbers of canaries always mean either the **Cape** (Kaapse Kanarie, *canicollis*) or **Yellow Canary** (Geelkanarie, *S. flaviventris*). Both like to feed on open fields, often in bird parties with other species. The Cape Canary has the characteristic grey hind crown and nape and lacks facial markings. They love to chatter away in the canopy of blue gum forests without showing themselves! The Yellow Canary can be confusing as the male is bright yellow with facial markings and relatively easy to identify, but the female and juveniles with a dull grey front, lots of streaking on the breast and yellow rump can be confused with **White-throated Canary** (Witkeelkanarie, *S. albobularis*) which is less common. Diagnostic features being the white throat, grey-brown breast, heavy bill and bright yellow rump. **Streaky-headed Seedeaters** (Streepkopkanarie, *S. gularis*) are relatively common in the plain and are seen on Proteas and fruit bearing trees. Singly or in pairs, they are usually seen feeding, with their prominent but narrow white eye brow and brown not yellow rump. Both Black-headed Canary (Swartkopkanarie, *Alaria alaria*) and Cape Siskin (Kaapse Pietjiekanarie, *Pseudochloroptila totta*) have been reported near Bredasdorp but this could not be confirmed so far. The Protea Canary (Witvlerkkanarie, *S. leucopterus*) appears to be absent in the Agulhas Plain.

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



The Limpopo Salt Whisperers

The Springfield Saltpans, one of Agulhas National Park's most iconic places of interest and cultural sites, can easily relate to the work of the "Limpopo Salt Whisperers", featured in a magazine article recently. A tradition that is being handed down from mother to daughter for generations among a handful of women living near the Baleni hot springs, about half an hour's drive from Giyani in the Limpopo Province, is being investigated and monitored by the EPRU-led project done for the Water Research Commission, which investigates the value of this indigenous knowledge. It is not just the technical knowledge relating to their specific method of salt extraction that they share amongst themselves, though. They also hand down the rituals which they believe will appease the ancestral spirits as they go about the task of mining salt, and they are careful in their induction of inexperienced women into the salt-harvesting guild. This women-only practice goes back an estimated 1,700 years, and involves a simple but effective process of scraping a crust of salt-laden soil from the dry riverbed during winter months, which is then extracted from the mud by dissolving it in water. The brine is filtered through baskets of mud, and then heated until the water evaporates, leaving behind pure salt crystals. The women of the Mahumani community, who are guardians of this knowledge and the wetland where they have traditionally mined the salt for generations, either exchange their salt for groceries at nearby markets, or sell it for cash to local traders or traditional healers. View the full article in the Sep/Oct issue of *Water Wheel*, the magazine for the South African Water Research Commission: The Salt Whisperers. (SOURCE: *In the News*, 3 October 2018)



Agulhas National Park Regional Award winners

At the recent Regional Award ceremony for the Cape Cluster Parks held at the Two Oceans Aquarium, the Agulhas Housekeeping team won the Best performing business unit of the year award. Gerhard Adams, Alecene Windvogel en Forezia Davids represented the unit at the ceremony. The following staff members won the Excellent performance in the Workplace award: Alliston Appel, Veronique Du Plessis, Vincent Newman, Thesville Matheunis and Dewald October.





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Agulhas Kids In Parks (KIP) programme 2018

The Agulhas KIPs in the Park programme kicked off on October 10 with Gansbaai Primary the first school to take part in the programme this year. Only five schools attended the programme: Gansbaai, Masakhane, Elim/St Paul's, Struisbaai and Stanford learners took part in the programme which ended on October 26. As it was Marine Month much emphasis was put on marine pollution presented by De Hoop Nature Reserve. The learners also attended a programme at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, which regularly forms part of the programme. Agulhas KIP was supported by the Table Mountain National Park bus, driven by Mezbah Sellar, to transport the learners between the schools and the Bosheuvel Environmental Education Centre. Catering was done by Suzette Leonard and her team, much appreciated by all; and as one teacher remarked: "This was the best food we have ever had at Bosheuvel."

