

Birding Report Agulhas National Park

YEARLY REPORT 2010 (Revised)

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

At the end of 2009, the management of AGNP(Agulhas National Park) gave me permission to begin a process of recording the birds of the park. Together with my birding buddy Chris van Gass(Honorary Ranger) we proceeded to record the birds of the park. This is by no means a scientific paper but hopefully will add some value in the development of the AGNP.

METHOD:

I decided to use the SABAP2 recording system in order to give the research a more scientific approach. Wherever the current AGNP borders touched on a pentad, this pentad was included in the research area. I also included most of the pentads south of the 3435 line if they were not included yet as this represented the same ecosystem and also the Nuwejaarsrivier SMS and De Mond Nature Reserve. This amounts to 20 pentads.

A minimum of two hours observation is required per pentad and all habitats in the pentad has to be covered. Initially I covered most pentads in 2-3 hours in order to try and cover all the pentads twice in one year. This proved difficult as I could not be here that often. Pentads such as Waterford, Quoin Point and Nuwedam are far from Struisbaai from where I operate from, which makes them difficult to reach.

We would go out armed with binoculars and scope as well as the necessary birding books. The best birding occurs early morning, so most of the outings commenced at 06h00-07h00.

PENTAD COVERAGE:

So far only 15 of the 20 Pentads have been covered, most of them only once. Struisbaai pentad was covered the most times(x5), for obvious reasons.

OVERALL NUMBERS:

In the first year of this project we have counted 134 species. 87 of these were in the Struisbaai pentad and 77 in the Zoetendalsvlei pentad. The number of pentads are too small to be statistically significant at this stage.

STRUISBAAI PENTAD:

Struisbaai pentad includes coast-line, urban areas, fynbos areas above Agulhas including lookout road and golf course development, sewerage works near Struisbaai North, dunes north of Struisbaai and agricultural land (Zoetendalsvlei).

In 2010, 87 species was identified in Struisbaai Pentad. Rarities in this pentad included the Northern Giant-Petrel. This was the first observation ever of this species in this pentad.

ZOETENDALSVLEI PENTAD:

The Zoetendalsvlei pentad includes the Springfield Saltpan, Soutbospan, Petrus Swart pan to the west, the Zoetendalsvlei perimeter, Nuwejaarsriver up to Wiesdrif, cultivated land near Wiesdrift and the first kilometer of the Heuningnesrivier . This is certainly the most exciting birding destination in the park.

We identified 68 species on only two cards. The highlight in this area are the raptors i.e. Steppe Buzzard, Black Harrier, Black-shouldered kite, Yellow-billed kite, African Marsh-Harrier and African Fish-Eagle. For the avid birder, this will always be an excellent wader area. The last six months unfortunately was dry with the result that waders were scarce. For the birding tourist, Great White Pelican and Greater(and Lesser) Flamingo is an attraction when the salt works have water.

A special occasion was to witness a Caspan Tern flying over me from the Zoetendalsvlei towards the breeding area at the saltpans, with a fish in the beak, showing that they feed in the vlei.

The removal of Alien trees in this pentad might have an influence on the raptor population, but the wide open fields is certainly an improvement and reminiscent of the Botswana wetlands.

The salt works/pan needs careful attention as the alien deforestation has left the pan open to by-passers and the Caspian Terns breeding colony might be at risk as the gravel road is now in plain view of their breeding ground.

The clearing of the reeds on the Zoetendalsvlei would be a big step in the right direction as currently very little birding on the vlei is possible.

VOELVLEI PENTAD:

The Voelvlei pentad includes the southern 2/3's of the Voelvlei, Agricultural land, a small portion of the saltworks, Springfield farm, Bergplaas and the Anysberg. 32 species were recorded in one outing, most of it around the vlei

Specials in the Voelvlei pentad must be the Larks. Agulhas Long-billed, Large-billed and Cape Clapper lark all can be found here. The vlei is an excellent wader and warbler area. Lesser

Swamp-warbler, Little Stint, Great White Pelican , Wattled Starling, Greater Flamingo, Common Waxbill and Cape Grassbird was some of the sightings.

Voelvllei should certainly become part of the AGNP in the future if at all possible.

Anysberg and the Bergplaas area was badly burnt and produced very little in terms of birding. This should change soon as the veld is quickly returning to its former glory.

RIETFONTEIN PENTAD:

Die Rietfontein pentad includes some farmyards(including Rietfontein), Melkbospan, a smaller pan to the south, beginning of the Anysberg, agricultural land and some alien forest near Vlooiakraal.

Specials included the Open-bill Stork seen at Rietfontein. A very special observation was a Denham's Bustard chick accidentally found next to the road.

The Melkbospan, it's fountain? and its smaller cousin to the south should be carefully managed as a birding destination. The track on the west of the Melkbospan was a revelation with absolutely fantastic flora.

This pentad is littered with fence wire after the "big" fire. I narrowly escaped seriously damage to my vehicle. Be careful!

WATERFORD PENTAD:

The Waterford pentad consists of mountainous fynbos, agricultural land, coastline and a hidden fountain/dam. We only covered the mountainous fynbos during our two hours in the pentad, 30 minutes of which we were stuck on the mountain with 4 wheels off the ground!

Only 9 species were identified, but the Orange-breasted sunbirds were everywhere. This is their haven! This is certainly one of the most pristine fynbos areas in the Western Cape.

The fountain/dam on the left on your way to Quoin point should be developed for birding. Currently it is impossible to see the water. This is a very special site.

SUIDERSTRAND PENTAD:

The Suiderstrand pentad includes urban area, coast line (including the fresh water inlet east of Suiderstrand), Sandberg, Renosterkop plaas, dunes and fynbos along the gravel road between Renosterkop en Zoetendalsvlei.

Thirty one species was identified. This area is Black Harrier country although we have not seen any on our outings. They are known to breed on the higher ground. Sightings included African Black Oystercatcher, African Fish-Eagle and Common Whimbrel.

The Renosterkop vlei could be a lucrative birdwatching site in a wet season. The clearing of the alien vegetation has already opened up most of the pan. The Melkhout trees in the area are also very productive for birding.

NUWEDAM PENTAD:

The Nuwedam Pentad which includes a gravel road through the Waterford farm (AGNP), burnt fynbos and agricultural land and dam around Nuwedam farm delivered some special sightings. Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Orangebreasted Sunbird, African Marsh-Harrier and African Harrier Hawk were identified. The African Harrier-Hawk was the first ever for this pentad.

DIE DAM PENTAD:

This pentad includes the spectacular Raterivier farm which was another great birding spot. It also includes Die Dam resort, some of the most beautiful coastline in SA and a scenic piece of fynbos to the east of the Raterivier farm.

Sightings included the beautiful African Paradise Flycatcher, Barn Owl, Ruddy Turnstone and Hartlaubs Gull. This is the furthest east I have seen the Hartlaub's Gull in the past 2 years. Previously they could be seen in Struisbaai Harbour.

WOLVENGAT PENTAD:

This pentad is mostly cultivated land and only its southern section includes part of the park i.e Rater river farm. It also includes the exciting vlei/fountain to the right of the road to Rater river. Currently overgrown with aliens, this could become a prime birding spot for the AGNP.

Interesting birds were African Pipit, Red-chested Cuckoo, Southern Boubou and Yellow Bishop.

BRANDFONTEIN PENTAD:

This very small pentad includes the southern side of Anysberg, Brandfontein and historical Aasfontein.

Birds seen included Cape Longclaw, White-fronted Plover, Spotted Thick-knee and Chestnut-banded plover.

It was in this pentad that we sadly found a black-harrier killed in a trap. This was reported to management although it later appeared to be on private land.

PHOTOGRAPHY:

Since November 2010 I have begun collecting pictures of birds taken in the Agulhas National Park. So far I have taken pictures of about 60 bird species. Anybody who would like to add to this collection are more than welcome.

THE FUTURE:

The aim for 2011 is to first cover all the pentads once and thereafter try to push it to x 3 cards per pentad. I have contacted the Nuwejaarsrivier SMS and permission to enter their farms will open up some very interesting areas adjacent to the AGN Park.

If you look back at the SABAP birding history of the park, you find that there are quite large variations from year to year which probably is weather dependant. Wet seasons being the better birding years because of the feeding in the pans and vlei's. The more cards we collect over the next few years the more accurate the information becomes(and the more interesting).

CONCLUSION:

I would like to thank the management of the AGNP for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this way and hope this will in a small way help to protect this beautiful National Park.