

Agulhas National Park Birding Project

YEARLY REPORT 2011

INTRODUCTION:

Although time was a major constraint in 2011, it was a very successful year. As our experience and knowledge of the AGNP area increased, so did our numbers per pentad. But as so often happens in life, the more you know, the more you realize how little you know! Birding in the AGNP pentads just never cease to surprise.

IMPROVEMENT OF METHODOLOGY:

During the first year of the project, the focus was on covering as many pentads as possible, i.e. aiming for the minimum of 2 hrs only and then often going on to the next pentad. This is acceptable for SABAP2, but made comparison between the different pentads unreliable for our purposes. SABAP 2 still requires the 2 hrs “bash” of initial intensive birding but altogether allows for 5 days per pentad. So for 2011 we began to record each pentad for longer hours, often as much as 10 hrs within the allowed 5 days. This increased our species numbers dramatically and is thus a better representation of pentad species.

SABAP2 allows for the identification of species by call alone. Many species such as Sombre Greenbul for instance is hardly ever seen but very often heard. With the improvement of equipment (Roberts Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa), identification of birds by call became more reliable and was often used.

We also began to use photography very successfully. By taking pictures of species, it was possible to go home and study these pictures, often to find that “new species” were simply immature, non-breeding lbj's or females.

Only 19 of the 20 Pentads was covered, Quoin Point being the only exception. Struisbaai pentad was covered the most times(x6), for obvious reasons, with Zoetendalsvlei a close second (x5). A highlight of pentad coverage was the 4 new pentads covered which was mostly in the Nuwejaarsrivier SMA. We were able to cover the farms of Dirk Human, Dirkie Swart, Johannes Uys and Michael van Breda. Stephan Badenhorst, manager of the Pratt farms, gave us permission to cover the western Voelvllei area. We were very well received and enjoyed some of the most interesting habitat in the area.

OVERALL NUMBERS:

In the first year of this project we have counted 134 species. At the end of 2011, this figure stands at 161, which means 27 new species were recorded in 2011. The pentad with the most species recorded was Zoetendalsvlei pentad with 110 species. Close second is Struisbaai pentad with 100 species. The number of cards per pentad are too small to be statistically significant at this stage.

STRUISBAAI PENTAD:

In 2011, 13 new species were identified in Struisbaai Pentad. Little Stint, Little Grebe, Grey-backed Cisticola and Sombre Green was some of the new ones observed.



ZOETENDALSVLEI PENTAD:

For the first time, we could cover the northern section of the pentad on the farm of Johannes Uys.

We identified 41 new species in this pentad to bring the total to 110 for the pentad. Some of the new species include: African Purple Swamphen, Agulhas Clapper lark, Agulhas Long-billed lark, Cape Shoveler, Hottentot Teal(which was rather abundant), Ruff, Pearl-breasted Swallow and Purple Heron.

For the first time we could see large expanses of water on the Zoetendalsvlei from within the park which revealed vast numbers of waterbirds and an African Fish-Eagle pair basking in the sun.

I mentioned in the previous report that the removal of alien trees might influence the raptor population. This seemed not to have been the case as most raptors were still visible. **The alien**

deforestation at the salt works/pan was a concern in the previous report as it has left the pan open to by-passers on the gravel road and the Caspian Terns breeding colony might have been at risk as the gravel road now was in plain view of their breeding ground. In April 2011, I for the first time noticed that there were none resident. This was also the case during December and we can only hope that this is not permanent as they have been one of the major attractions for many years.



VOELVLEI PENTAD:

75 species have now been recorded in two outings, most of it around the vlei, but the alien forests proved surprisingly lucrative.

Some new species include: Glossy Ibis, Little Stint and Orange-breasted sunbird. Anyenberg and the Bergplaas area has recovered well and several species can now be seen in the vicinity. The farm was occupied for the holiday and birding was thus limited. We will be recording the

Bergplaas species soon as a special project.



RIETFONTEIN PENTAD:

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

Specials included: Rufous-chested Sparrow-hawk, Black Sawwing, African Paradise-flycatcher, Bar-throated Apalis, Cape Longclaw and Lanner Falcon. Two resident Spotted Eagle-Owl was seen near the Melkbospan in the Melkhout trees to the south.



WATERFORD PENTAD:

The Waterford pentad delivered 19 new species of which Cape Batis, African Pipit, Hartlaub's Gull and Little Grebe was the most interesting.



SUIDERSTRAND PENTAD:

The Suiderstrand pentad includes urban area, coast line (including the fresh water inlet east of Suiderstrand), Sandberg, Renosterkop chalets and the dunes behind them.

Thirty three new species was identified in this pentad. Included was Swift Tern, Spotted Eagle-owl, Ruddy Turnstone, Sandwich Tern, Long-billed Crombec, Cape Grassbird and Bar-throated Apalis.

As a special project within the Suiderstrand Pentad, we also listed the birds found at or near the Renosterkop chalets. Altogether 42 species were found.



ELIM PENTAD:

The Elim pentad includes Elim town and farmland. The Black-Oystercatcher area which is part of the SMA and belongs to Dirk Human was very special. Dirk kindly showed me around on the farm which is a birders paradise. We identified 67 species which included Malachite Kingfisher, Cape Longclaw, Greater Striped Swallow, Southern Masked Weaver and Yellow-billed Egret.



VILJOENSHOF PENTAD:

The Viljoenshof pentad is a rather quiet pentad until you reach the small town of Viljoenshof which is a birding oasis! Only 33 species could be identified of which Southern Tchagra, Red-chested Cuckoo, African Dusky Flycatcher and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow was the most interesting. This area deserves a longer visit in future.



HEUNINGRUG PENTAD:

The Heuningrug pentad consists of dry farm land, some renosterbos and alien forest. We identified 73 species one of which had us very excited for a while. The Yellow-Throated Petronia turned out not to be so Yellow! Some of the interesting other species were Acacia Pied Barbet,

Agulhas Clapper Lark, Cardinal Woodpecker, Grey-backed Cysticola and Pin-tailed Wydah.



IN SUMMARY:

The year 2011 was another good birding year. Our methods improved. Our knowledge have improved. We have met many of the owners of the Nuwejaars SMA, which was a privilege. Hopefully we will be able to build on the experience!

Our thanks to the AGNP management for allowing us to run this project!

Wim de Klerk