

AGULHAS NATIONAL PARK BIRDING PROJECT

YEARLY REPORT 2013(Revised)

INTRODUCTION

The AGNP Birding Project has now completed its 4th year and begins to show statistics which can be of value to management. It has been another exceptional year of birding due to the high rainfall. For the first time in the history of the project, normal renosterveld was flooded so extensively that water birds were recorded like never before in places never before thought possible. Vlei areas were filled to the brim even as late as the 31st December.

The project has reached 80+ field sheets stage, all submitted to SABAP2. This means the average field sheets submitted per pentad is now 4. The species list for the project has reached the 200 mark and stands at 204 after 4 years of intensive birding. This means 30 new species were recorded in 2013.

We have one new pentad added to the project i.e. Kosierskraal which means we now have 21 pentads to cover per year. This is because we would like to cover all of the pentads of the Agulhas Plain which form part of either the AGNP or the Nuwejaarsrivier SMA. This makes sense as they all drain into either the Ratel river system or the Heuningnes river system via the Nuwejaars river.

The removal of the alien plantation seems to have improved the wetlands even further and the fynbos seems to have recovered well after the veld fire. There is an abundance of food for the birds and this shows in their numbers.

The removal of alien plantations has also revealed some excellent birding sites and the Agulhas Plain now have even more promise as a birding destination. Various vlei areas have potential for bird hides and these must be erected with care so as to address the need of the birding tourist, which means it will have to take into account the needs of birding photographers.

Although the project started as a study of the AGNP birds, it has very quickly shown that it is senseless to ignore the bordering Nuwejaarsrivier SMA. This project has now evolved into a Agulhas Plains Project rather than just a AGNP project. The two entities are so entwined, are drained by the same river systems and share the very large birding population. Therefore the name of the project will in future change to the Agulhas Plain Birding Project and the report will be all inclusive.

With the new MYBIRDPATCH system, it makes sense to in future report to Nuwejaars river SMA owners in the form of MYBIRDPATCH assessments, as farms can now be registered as separate birding areas.

The highlight of 2013 has to be the first recording of the RED DATA LIST – Endangered Hottentot Buttonquail! What a moment when I saw the first picture of one! This surely has to be promoted as the star attraction to the AGNP as we now have proof of the existence of this endangered species in the park!

METHODOLOGY

Each field trip is well planned in advance so that all habitats can be covered effectively. Where necessary we phone the relevant managers of the farm or AGNP area. We usually leave between 05h00 and 06h00 as the best birding time is probably between sunrise and the following 5 hrs(season dependent).

We go out armed with binoculars, scope and camera. We use the SABAP maps for planning and a GPPS to assure we stay in a specific pentad. Reference tools used are:

SASOL Bird of Southern Africa – Sinclair, Hockey, Tarboton and Ryan

Birds of Southern Africa. Complete Photographic Field Guide. Sinclair, Ryan

SASOL Southern African LBJ's Made Simple. Doug Newman, Gordon King

The Raptor Guide of Southern Africa. Oberpriller and Cillie.

Pipits of Southern Africa. Faansie Peacock

Roberts Birds of Southern Africa. Laptop version.

Field guide to shorebirds of Southern Africa. Cowgill and Davis

Birds are identified by viewing but also bird calls. The use of recorded bird calls have increased our accuracy significantly. We have now also begun recording the calls of the birds in the area as often you hear it but don't see it. It is then possible to go home and search for the call in a bank of bird calls.

Birds are listed in the order they are seen. Hourly counts are marked.

In the planning stage, we would watch the weather forecast in order to target the days with sunshine and little wind(if possible). Overcast or windy days negatively influence the counting. We would often in preparation visit the SABAP website to study the birds already listed for that specific pentad and study the species not yet ticked for that pentad. This would include studying habitat, habits and calls.

All bird lists are then submitted electronically to SABAP2. SABAP2 scrutinizes the lists for "out of range" species and if there are any, sends us an "out of range" form which we have to submit. If substantial evidence can be produced, these species are accepted for that specific pentad.

STATISTICS BY PENTAD

NUWEDAM PENTAD(3435_1935)

The NUWEDAM pentad includes the northern half of Waterford area and some agricultural land. The Waterford area has some of the best untouched fynbos in the Western Cape and has recovered very well after the fire damage a few years ago. The Nuwedam farm was inaccessible during the visit.

9 new species were recorded for this pentad in this project, the most interesting being the first record of the Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Diederik Cuckoo as well as Secretary Bird.

SABAP has recorded 88 species for this pentad so far compared to the 78 of the project. Three field sheets have been submitted for the project so far.

VILJOENSHOF PENTAD(3435_1940)

This pentad includes an alien infested area south of Elim. It is encouraging to see that the clearing of alien vegetation is still in process, but much more needs to be done especially towards Elim town. It also includes a small part of the Viljoenshof community which is a birding haven.

11 new species were recorded for the pentad in this project of which another record of the African Black Duck and a Lanner Falcon was the most interesting. SABAP has 82 species for this pentad on record compared to the 66 of the project. Three field sheets have been submitted for the project so far.

ELIM PENTAD(3435_1945)

This pentad includes Elim town, the Nuwejaars river wetland system, the Waschkraal vlei area (Dirk Human) and some dry agricultural land. It also includes 4 of the wine estates with a keen interest in avitourism. This area has a tremendous opportunity for birding tourism to complement its wine tasting. Alien clearing has beautified the area substantially.

17 new species were recorded this year for the project of which the White-faced Duck, Spotted Thicknee and Hamerkop were the most interesting. It is a very good area to see LBJ's such as the larks, cisticolas, reed-warblers and pipits. The African Black Duck Hide is near the Zoetendals Winery and gives birders the opportunity to try and see this elusive species.

SABAP has 140 species listed for this pentad and the project 102, but I believe this pentad is still under reported. Three field sheets have been submitted for the project.

BO-VOËLVLEI PENTAD (3435_1950)

This pentad includes the Northern part of Voelvllei which is a birding paradise as well as the Nuwejaars river wetland. There are some agricultural land which delivers well on LBJ's. The farms Haasvlakte and Elandsdrift falls into this pentad and owners have been very accommodating to allow for extensive birding. Especially the Elandsdrift access to Voelvllei was extremely productive this year and produced some very special moments.

15 new species was recorded for this pentad of which the Black Crake, Hottentot Teal, South African Shelduck and Southern Pochard was the most interesting. SABAP has listed 113 species so far for this pentad and the project stands at 90 species. 3 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

HEUNINGRUG PENTAD(3435_1955)

This pentad is mostly farm land(Heuningrug, Valsfontein and Mierkraal), but includes a southern tip of the Nuwejaars river system, which has been very lucrative for water birds. Access to the farms have been limited thus far, which means counting has mostly been from the roads in the pentad. The Heuningrug itself has not been covered and might produce some specials in future.

3 new species were recorded, none of which was spectacular. SABAP has recorded a total of 117 species for this pentad and the project stands at 101 species. Closer co-operation with the farm owners need to be established in order to improve access. Only Diko and Dirk Swart has been approached so far.

3 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP to date.

GROOTEILAND PENTAD(3435_2000)

This pentad is made up of the farm Zeekoeivlei(Pieter Albertyn), Klipfontein and the wetland to the north(Karsrivierlei). This wetland system had some of the best birding on the Agulhas Plain this year. Birding along the Bredasdorp/Struisbaai tar road delivered thousands of water birds and hours of birding. The area includes Varkvlei which is on Pieter's farm. Access to other farms in the pentad has not yet been established.

13 new species has been recorded for this pentad in this project, such as Sombre Greenbul, White-throated Canary, SA Shelduck, Rock Kestrel, Pied Avocet and Purple Heron. Although nothing spectacular, the sheer numbers of birds made up for lack of "specials"

SABAP's official list has 103 species recorded for this pentad and the project stands at 100 species. Five field sheets have been submitted to SABAP so far. Much more intensive birding needs to be done in this pentad

PRINCEKRAAL PENTAD(3435_2005)

This pentad is mostly agricultural land but is well reported probably because it is traversed by many roads which makes access easier. It includes farms such as Prinskraal, Droërivier

and Meulvlei none of which access has been obtained for. The many roads in the area though, passes most of the habitat in the region.

9 new species was recorded for the pentad. This pentad probably caught the most attention this year as a Marabou Stork was noticed. Other interesting species was the Southern Pochard found in large numbers. SABAP has 123 species recorded for this pentad. The project stands at 93 species. Four field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

WATERFORD PENTAD(3440_1935)

The Waterford pentad includes the southern half of Waterford, the wetland/vlei north of Die Dam and a small coastal area at Buffelsjagt bay. It also includes the farm Koksrivier below the Waterford AGNP. In the 2012 report I suggested that the aliens be removed to utilize this as birding area and the results immediately started to show! Due to the removal of aliens and the exceptional rainy season, the above mentioned vlei was an absolute revelation. Previously hardly noticed by passersby, it is now very approachable and the ideal spot for a bird hide. This vlei produced 3 species not SABAP recorded in the AGNP before! Well done to management for a job well done! This pan/vlei has no name on any map. Perhaps we should give this pan/vlei a name such as Maccoa vlei(First Maccoa Duck recorded in the park)!

15 new species were identified for this pentad. The Greater Crested Grebe, Black-necked Grebe and Maccoa Duck has never been recorded in the AGNP before. Other interesting species include African Paradise-flycatcher, Southern Pochard and Whiskered Tern. SABAP has listed 83 species for this pentad up to date, the project stands at 70 species. Four field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

WOLVENGAT PENTAD(3440_1940)

This pentad includes the Northern Raterivier area(which includes the farmstead) and Western half of the Melkbospan, as well as the Wolvengat settlement. It also includes Gonnaskraal and DirkUyskraal farm where access has not yet been obtained. A large part of the Rater river is in this pentad and great progress has been made in the rehabilitation of the wetland. This wetland has massive potential for attracting a wide range of species in future.

5 new species were recorded in this pentad including Dideric and Klaas's Cuckoo. SABAP has 98 species for this pentad currently. The project stands at 73 species. 3 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

RIETFONTEIN PENTAD(3440_1945)

This pentad will always be a major birding destination in the AGNP due to the Melkbospan and Rietfontein pan and homestead. Now the first official record of a Hottentot Buttonquail

in the Agulhas National Park has been made in this pentad and this should be a great attraction to birders. The fountain next to the Melkbospan could be an excellent site for a birdhide and should probably be combined with a hide on the pan itself.

11 new species have been recorded for the pentad. The most interesting being the Hottentot Buttonquail and Greater Crested Grebe. The Hottentot Buttonquail should be used as a marketing tool to attract birders to the Rietfontein farmstead. After announcing the find on Capebirdnet.com, there was wide interest from birders who have been searching for it for a long time.

SABAP has 117 species listed for this pentad, the project stands at 103. 4 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

VOËLVLEI PENTAD(3440_1950)

Voelvrei Pentad includes the farms bordering Voelvrei which belongs to Dirkie/Diko Swart and Urban/Hadre Pratt, as well as the Bergplaas and Springfield farms of AGNP. It also includes the largest portion of the Anysberg, part of Soutpanne and the dams west of the Brandfontein road. Removal of aliens in the Springfield area has revealed some great birding spots which is not affected as much by the dry season.

The removal of aliens next to the Brandfontein road has caused the breeding colony of Caspian Terns to leave about 3 years ago. The area is now better protected from the road as the habitat has rehabilitated, but unfortunately the Caspians have not returned. The bird hide which does not hide humans when they approach, could also play a part in this problem. An artificial wall bulldozed could be a solution as it will shield their breeding site and create a more permanent water near to the hides.

8 new species were recorded for the pentad in this project. Some of the more interesting ones are: Greater Crested Grebe, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover, Pied Kingfisher and Burchell's Coucal.

SABAP has recorded 104 species for this pentad and the project 99. 4 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

ZOETENDALSVLEI PENTAD(3440_1955)

The Zoetendalsvlei pentad includes part of the Springfield Saltpan, Soutbos and the pan to the west, the Zoetendalsvlei perimeter, Nuwejaars river up to Wiesdrift, cultivated land near Wiesdrif and the first kilometer of the Heuningnes river on the farm Visserdrift(Johannes Uys) . This is certainly the most exciting birding destination in the AGNP and Nuwejaars river SMA. Extensive removal of aliens has changed the landscape dramatically for the better.

9 New species were recorded for the pentad this year. First of all, Whiskered Tern literally invaded the pentad due to all the water. Zitting Cisticola, Southern Tchagra, Lanner Falcon, Common Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Cape Teal were other interesting additions.

SABAP has listed an impressive 143 species for this pentad, the project stands at 133! So far 8 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

The Biological alien control area on the Zoetendalsvlei is a very good area for a bird hide. It is critical though that the approach by humans should be completely shielded.

KLIPFONTEIN PENTAD(3440_2000)

This pentad is mostly agricultural land but includes a beautiful piece of the Heuningnes river on the farm Visserdrift(Johannes Uys). There are also large fynbos areas to the south on Zoetendals vlei(Michael van Breda) and Klipfontein(Johannes Uys). Access to Grasrug side of the Heuningnes has not been obtained. Due to the excess rain this year, Klipfontein was very productive.

5 new species were identified of which the Whiskered Tern and White-faced Duck is the most interesting. SABAP has listed 121 species for this pentad. The Project has 85 species listed. Better access to the Heuningnes river could improve these numbers significantly. 4 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP thus far.

The challenge for 2014 would be to find the Hottentot Buttonquail which apparently occurs here and to improve access to the Heuningnes river.

DE MOND PENTAD(3440_2005)

This Pentad consists of the De Mond Nature Reserve managed by Cape Nature and the farms, De Mond and Vogelgevang(Paul Maxley) which both have extensive wetlands as well as agricultural land. Vogelgevang has a large coastal fynbos area and coastal area which is difficult to reach. De Mond this year has been an absolute birders haven and at one stage I estimated that there was about 5000-7000 terns alone visible. Simply an experience of a lifetime! There are new boardwalks on the southern side of the river which make it much more accessible and hopefully will control human access to a degree.

27 new species was recorded for this project. Red Knot, Greater Sand Plover, African Dusky Flycatcher, African Stonechat, African Spoonbill, Cloud Cisticola, Common Sandpiper, Common Tern, Common House-martin, Lesser Flamingo, Sanderling and SA Shelduck was just a few of the new entries .

SABAP has listed 182 species for this pentad so far which is the highest of all the pentads, the project list now stands at 117. This was the first pentad where we succeeded in

submitting one card with more than a 100 species(106) to SABAP. A personal record for the project after 7hrs in the veld. 3 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP so far.

De Mond forms an important part of avitourism in the Agulhas Plain and much more need to be done about monitoring birdlife in the reserve.

QUOIN POINT PENTAD(3445_1935)

This pentad was surveyed because it forms part of the greater Agulhas Plain and is a Cape Nature nature reserve. It is also an important reserve because of Quoin Rock which is one of the last breeding colonies of the Bank Cormorant. It consists of coastal dunes and fynbos and a small fishing village, Buffelsjagt Bay and is a very dry, arid pentad. Access roads to the area is very bad which probably has a protective effect on the Bank Cormorant colony. Because of distance and time-constraints, very little birding has been done in this pentad.

2 new species was recorded on one outing. SABAP has 80 species listed for this pentad. The project has 47 listed so far. 2 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP so far. An initiative from Overberg Birdlife SA might improve the situation as quarterly counts are planned for this pentad.

DIE DAM (3445_1940)

This pentad includes "Die Dam" settlement, coastal birding, southern fynbos area of Ratelrivier and last 2 km of the Ratelrivier. It also includes one of the three "Drie Vleitjies". This area has improved tremendously due to the removal of alien vegetation and rehabilitation of the area is well on its way. Hats off to management as this will soon be a prime birding area. There is a man made canal draining the old farmland which runs to the sea in the centre of the pentad which now became visible and this adds to the attraction in the area.

11 new species were identified even though we spent only 2.5 hrs in this pentad. Lanner Falcon, Rock Kestrel, Whiskered Tern, White-Rumped Swift and Steppe Buzzard was some of the new species recorded for the pentad in this project . SABAP has 77 species listed for this pentad which is what we have achieved for the project as well. 3 Field sheets has been submitted to SABAP.

RIETFONTEIN SE BAAI (3445_1945)

This very small pentad has fynbos overgrown by aliens as well as some fine coastal viewing. Aliens have been cleared in large areas and this has improved birding in the area. Two of the "Drie Vleie" is also in this pentad and has proved very productive this year due to the heavy rainfall.

15 new species were recorded for this pentad of which the first Hottentot Buttonquail ever reported in the AGNP must be the highlight. What an experience this was after 3 years of

searching for it! Other very special ones were: Black-necked Grebe, Cape Teal, Whiskered Tern, Cape Gannet(the first for the project), Steppe Buzzard, Plain-backed Pipit, Little Grebe and Large-billed Lark.

SABAP has 84 species listed for this pentad, and the project has reached 57 species. These figures from SABAP is a cause for concern because after extensively birding this coastal pentad, we never get to more than 37 species, whereas some of the previous submissions has up to 60 species. This leads us to believe that these lists might belong to other pentads. I have taken this up with SABAP and they have raised their concerns and will look into it. They have expressed similar experiences to ours.

3 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP so far.

BRANDFONTEIN PENTAD(3445_1950)

The Brandfontein pentad is a small pentad which includes the southern slopes of the Anysberg , Brandfontein and Aasfontein cottages. The road between Renosterkop and Brandfontein has some pristine fynbos for fynbos birding. There is a few small pans which fills up in good rainy seasons. The Aasfontein area has been inaccessible lately and was largely excluded this year. Access to a small area of Renosterkop farm in the pentad was though obtained.

12 new species was recorded for the pentad this year. Bar-throated Apalis, Common Waxbill, Black Harrier, African Pipit, African Snipe and Agulhas Long-billed Lark was some of the more interesting ID's.

According to SABAP statistics, 103 species have been recorded for this pentad. The project list stands at 68. 4 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

SUIDERSTRAND PENTAD (3445_1955)

The Suiderstrand pentad includes urban area, coast line (including the fresh water inlet east of Suiderstrand), Sandberg, Renosterkop chalets(AGNP) and the dunes behind them. It includes the Renosterkop Pan as well as Pietie se Punt(but so far I have not been able to obtain access). The Southern tip of the Zoetendalsvlei and the direct gravel road running towards Renosterkop is also included. The alien clearing in the area is a massive operation and seems to be well organized and systematic. Once again hats off to the teams responsible!

14 new species was identified in this pentad. First prize was Maccoa Duck and Greater Crested Grebe which has never been recorded in the AGNP before 2013. Some other new species for this pentad was: Yellow-billed Kite, Whiskered Tern, SA Shelduck, Sanderling,

Little Grebe, Hartlaub's Gull, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Common ringed Plover, Common Greenshank and Cape Shoveler .

SABAP has listed 92 species for this pentad. After our December submission the project list will stand on 97!

5 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

What a surprise to find the Rasperpunt boardwalk. This certainly was a great job and well thought out. Well done! The building of a bird hide at the Renosterkop pan should be seriously considered as it is highly accessible and already has traffic. A hide might protect birds more than disturb them.

STRUISBAAI PENTAD (3445_2000)

Struisbaai pentad includes coast-line, urban areas, fynbos areas above Agulhas including lookout road and golf course development, sewage works near Struisbaai North, dunes north of Struisbaai and agricultural land (Zoetendalsvlei). The sewage works has been upgraded and unfortunately most of the dams filled up which destroyed a wonderful opportunity for avitourism. The Langerzandt wetlands which was supposed to be cleared of aliens by the developers as part of the development, has not yet been cleared. Despite this the wetland has become an absolute haven for birds and because of its close position is another attraction to tourists. On one outing 36 species was counted within 2hrs!

9 new species was found this year. The first prize being the Black-crowned Night-heron found at Langerzandt wetland and the Maccoa Duck found at the sewage works. Others were: Streaky-headed Seedeater, SA Shelduck, Sanderling, Plain-backed Pipit, Damara Tern and Little Rush-warbler.

SABAP has recorded 127 species for this pentad. So far 117 species have been recorded in this pentad for this project. 10 Field sheets have been submitted to SABAP.

AGNP OVERALL STATISTICS

As mentioned we have covered all 21 pentads at least once this year. 25 field sheets were submitted this year and over a three year period we have now submitted 82 field sheets to SABAP.

The overall tally for birds observed in the AGNP in this project now stands at 204 species which is 30 new species for 2013. We are still waiting for the verdict on some new species recorded which could influence the numbers.

The most species recorded on one card was 104 species in the De Mond pentad during December. This was over a 3 day period and 7 hrs of observation.

The species per pentad for the project makes for interesting reading:

	Pentad No	Project	SABAP
	3430_195		
Kosierskraal	0	79	86
	3435_193		
Nuwedam	5	78	93
	3435_194		
Viljoenshof	0	63	90
	3435_194		
Elim	5	102	138
	3435_195		
Bo-Voelvlei	0	90	123
	3435_195		
Heuningrug	5	101	117
	3435_200		
Groote Eiland	0	100	123
	3435_200		
Princekraal	5	93	134
	3440_193		
Waterford	5	70	83
	3440_194		
Wolvengat	0	78	103
	3440_194		
Rietfontein	5	103	125
	3440_195		
Voelvlei	0	99	118
	3440_195		
Zoetendalsvlei	5	133	152
	3440_200		
Klipfontein	0	85	128
	3440_200		
De Mond	5	117	193
	3445_193		
Quoin Point	5	47	80
	3445_194		
Die Dam	0	77	86
	3445_194		
Rietfontein se Baai	5	58	91
	3445_195		
Brandfontein	0	68	110
	3445_195		
Suiderstrand	5	97	116
Struisbaai	3445_200	118	139

The highest number of species per pentad understandably is De Mond with 193 species from 60 field sheets(3.2/field sheet). The De Mond Estuary is a RAMSAR site. The Zoetendalsvlei pentad has 155 species from 19 field sheets(8.1/field sheet). It is thus conceivable that the latter could reach 193 species after 60 field sheets and for that reason any day as important a birding site as De Mond! Elim has 138 species from only 11 field sheets submitted(11.5/field sheet)! Rietfontein has 125 species from only 6 Field sheets submitted(20.8/field sheet). Voelvlei 116 species from 9 field sheets(12.8/field sheet). This might not be statistically correct, but clearly shows that these areas are as important as De Mond in protecting our birds and should be registered with RAMSAR!

In 2010 135 species were identified, 2011 it was 154(14% increase), 2012 it was 174(12% increase) and this year 204(17% increase). Difficult to believe that species increased by another 17% this year, but this must be attributed to the exceptional year. By the end of December there was still water to be seen in every pentad and we know the birds will go where they find food!

DISCUSSION

Covering the pentads each year has become more and more difficult as the intensity increases and knowledge increases. Technically one becomes better at ID of species but this often means spending much longer at a specific site. In the end it has become rather challenging to get to all pentads this year. A new strategy will have to be found.

The project ideally should run for at least 5 years and every pentad should ideally be covered twice a year, once in winter and once in summer. In order to be able to cope, it may be necessary to take a week leave twice a year and do the 2 hr stint in each pentad rather than spending long hours in one pentad.

What milestones were reached this year?

1. 80 verified cards have now been submitted to SABAP for the project.
2. In the vast majority of pentads we have identified the most species by card according to SABAP statistics. This is a specific target because to be statistically of value, we should be able identify more birds than anyone else simply because of the time we spend here compared to other birders. Those where we are not the top ticker, such as coastal pentads are now investigated by SABAP to find out whether their numbers are correct.
3. We for the first time identified more than 100(105) species on one card. This is now the highest for any pentad in the project area(according to SABAP statistics) . Once

again, this is only important because one should be as good as the best if you want to be absolutely accurate with identification of species.

4. 30 new species was recorded for the project and we now have reached the 200 mark.

Why are these numbers important? Because birders scrutinize the SABAP website for new areas to cover and the higher these numbers, the more interesting it looks. By sending in more and more cards of high quality, we lift the profile of an area and in this way stimulate birding tourism in our area.

THE AGULHAS NATIONAL PARK

Just a few words on the park and its management. I have been covering most of the park for the past three years and must say that I am impressed with the developments, especially as far as the alien removal program. The rehabilitation of the renosterveld and fynbos is evident everywhere. I know next to nothing about fynbos and its rehabilitation, but all I can comment on is that it just seems very positive year after year. Congratulations!

Just a few positive comments/ideas to stimulate thought:

1. It is noted that most of the wires lying around especially in the Rietfontein area has been removed. This was an eye-sore. Well done. Great improvement.
2. Some of the more remote tracks are slowly being overgrown by aliens etc. These tracks might later be necessary for tourism(4x4?) . Is there a business plan to save some of these roads which often lead to prime birding spots, before they are obliterated? It will be very expensive if left too late, because once a Port Jackson becomes a tree, it is much more difficult to remove. One way of keeping open tracks could be to declare it as 4x4 routes. By using tracks regularly they often don't need much upkeep.
3. I have no doubt in my mind that AGNP should have its main focus as avitourism. There is no need for fencing, the tracks are already there to all the special areas. Perhaps a few of the tracks need attention especially in the wet areas, but travelling on tracks while birding is what most birders would enjoy, going a bit off track.
4. One of the reasons for declaring De Mond a RAMSAR site was the fact that it is a breeding site for Caspian Tern which is on the Red Data List. At the Springfield Saltpan we have just about lost the breeding colony of Caspian Tern which has breeding there for many years. Experts should be brought in to decide how to revive this breeding site by protecting the area from human traffic and perhaps create some sort of barrier between the breeding site and the road. The bird hides and its approach should be reconsidered.
5. Should we not involve a university or the ADU in proclaiming the rest of the wetlands in the Agulhas Plain as RAMSAR site? This would increase the profile for avitourism.

6. Placing of bird hides will be difficult because of the differences between the dry and wet season. Placing these hides needs to be well planned, taking into account not only the position of water during the different seasons, but also:
 - a. Position for early morning photography and late afternoon photography.
Many birders use photography and a well positioned hide will be a big attraction. Ideally they should be placed 180degrees with and against the sun. Ideally there should be objects in the water near the hide so that kingfishers etc can sit on them for photography. This can be done artificially by using dead tree trunks.
 - b. Taking into account where tourists have to park and remain shielded as they approach the hide. Ideally vehicles should be parked as much as 100m from the hide.
 - c. Sometimes the best birdhide is the vehicle of the tourist and the track should simply be allowed to run to the appropriate position usually slightly elevated but close enough to the water without showing too much of the vehicle.
 - d. Bird hides can be marketed as either wet season hides or dry season hides. They don't have to be user friendly year round.

MYBIRDPATCH

Doug Harebottle of SABAP is the brain-child behind MYBIRDPATCH. This is a system used to record the birds in a very specific area such as Soutpanne or Pietie se Punt. It is also more scientific in my opinion because it allows for the numbers of species seen within 24 hrs. I saw an estimated 5000 Common Terns at De Mond. MyBirdPatch field sheet would read 5000 Common Terns and my SABAP field sheet only Common Tern. Clearly a big advantage because if next year only one Common Tern turns up because they all died off due to Avian flu, my SABAP record won't pick up the discrepancy!

Another big advantage of MyBirdPatch is that we now can register a specific farm and give a farmer a specific number of species for his farm only. This becomes a marketable tool especially now that many of them have cottages to rent and would like anything which makes them more marketable.

It also is easier to record, because with SABAP I have to drive from one farm or entity to another in the same pentad to do the count. With MyBirdPatch I am within the same entity for the whole count which is more productive.

After discussion with the staff at AGNP, I have begun registering what we considered to be important "Patches" in the park. I have also approached many farmers of the Nuwejaars river SMA and did the same for them. This is a lengthy process as one would not like to rush things and end up with a mess. Owners also need to understand exactly what it is about and be sure they can trust us not to cause any unintended problems.

Patches can be registered as public sites as well as private sites and the status can be changed by the initiator at any stage. About 15 patches have been registered already and another 3 are currently in the process of being registered.

THE FUTURE

The strategy for 2014 would be:

1. Cover each pentad at least once, but preferably twice this year. This would mean submitting perhaps 42 field sheets.
2. Do 2 hr stints per pentad instead of the intensive 5-10hr stints
3. Identify the possibles not yet identified in the region and search for them.
4. Begin a process of GPS marking species in the AGNP and NSMA with the idea of maybe eventually writing a book on "Where to find birds in the AGULHAS Plains"
5. Bird lists of Renosterkop, Bergplaas, Rietfontein, Ratelrivier and Pietie se Punt to be completed.
6. Register the MYBIRDPATCH sites of the AGNP and begin counting them.
7. Find the first Flufftail in the AGNP or Nuwejaarsrivier SMA!
8. Find the Tambourine Dove that we are 99% sure occurs here.
9. Complete the BIRDS of the AGULHAS PLAINS Part 1 to 7 powerpoint lecture aimed at training the staff and guides in the AGNP and Nuwejaarsrivier SMA. This could also be used as marketing tool for the area. Maybe this could end up as a bird guide specific to the area.

THANK YOU

I would like to thank Bulelwa Msengi and staff of the AGNP for the privilege to be involved with the Agulhas Birding Project. Emmerentia, thank you for all the support. The same must be said of the farm owners and members of the Nuwejaars SMA, many of whom have become friends in caring for our natural heritage. All of them have treated me so well and received me so friendly that I will always be indebted. I really hope that I eventually can give the AGNP and Nuwejaars SMA a product they can use to the advantage of the Agulhas area and its people.

A special thanks to my birding buddies and wife Lolize(sometimes) for joining me on early morning expeditions while others still sleep! We could write a book about all the experiences!

Please understand that the opinions raised in this report is by no means professional and simply meant to stimulate thought. Please do not be offended by anything if this unintentionally happened. I assure you this report is meant only as a positive gesture towards creating a better South Africa.

May 2014 be a year to remember for all the right reasons.

Yours

Wim de Klerk