

AGULHAS PLAIN BIRDING PROJECT

YEARLY REPORT 2016

INTRODUCTION

In the 2015 “yearly report” a 5-year strategy was announced for the Agulhas Plain Birding Project. This meant that the Project would end with the final report in 2020. To make the interim yearly reports more user friendly, it will be shortened substantially and written in a more cryptic form. The final report in 2020 will then be written in thesis format.

So, did we achieve the goals set in the previous report? Here is a short summary:

1. After the addition of 4 new pentads there now are 27 pentads to be surveyed for the project. This was achieved early in December. 32 Checklists were submitted this year which brings the total for the project to 183.
2. Birdlasser was employed for all checklist submission to SABAP2. Although there were some niggles here and there it made a massive difference to productivity and accuracy. Thanks, Birdlasser team!
3. Bird hide development is at a stalemate. Work overload being the main obstacle, but 2017 hopefully will be a year of action!
4. The Agulhas Plain Birding Project website should be launched before the end of March! This will be a work in progress. Thanks to Sam Beeslaar who has spent endless hours designing the website!
5. The Buttonquail Bash for 2016 was cancelled as it was planned on Big Birding Day which proved to be a judgement error. Role players agree that we should find another more suitable date.
6. Bird guide training was last done November 2015. The Park received 3 pairs of second-hand binoculars during the year to be used by rangers. The Birds of the Agulhas Plain PowerPoint training module was updated and improved this year. Further training should be initiated by management.
7. **A further 20 new species were added to the Agulhas Plain Birding List. The list now stands at 255!** Ten of these were historical from reliable data received (including photograph). The list excludes new species reported (often by very experienced birders) but not confirmed by photograph or call recording. The new species recorded in 2016 and fulfilled protocol requirements, were:
 - a. **Black Cuckoo**
 - b. **African Goshawk**
 - c. **Verreaux’s Eagle**
 - d. **Buff-spotted Flufftail**
 - e. **Lesser Striped Swallow**
 - f. **African Grass-Owl**

- g. Western Osprey
- h. Black Cuckooshrike
- i. Baillon's Crake
- j. Knysna Woodpecker

PENTAD REPORTS:

1.

Pentad Number: 3430_1935

Pentad Name: Kouerivier

Habitat: Only half of this pentad falls within the Agulhas plain. It is drained by the Koue and Bloed rivers. The South-Western corner has some smallholdings and the Tierkloof Conservancy near Baardskeerdersbos with small dams. The South-Eastern pentad includes the very interesting De Kouderivier farm. The rest of the pentad is cultivated land and alien forest with a track that covers mountain fynbos.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 3

Project Species Number: 80

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 11

SABAP2 Species Number: 111

Comments: De Koude river is one of the few reliable sights for African Black Duck. Reports of Flufftail on the farm but not confirmed.

2.

Pentad Number: 3430_1940

Pentad Name: Janswarskraalrivier

Habitat: Includes large tracts of cultivated land on De Koude river farm, the Koue river with large sedge marshes which runs into the Janswarskraal river, large alien forests and a gravel road that runs past farm yards with small dams, just below the Soetmuis mountain.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 4

Project Species Number: 76

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 11

SABAP2 Species Number: 96

Comments: The De Koude Rivier farm has yearly White stork counts of 200 -1000. It is great area to ID Plain-backed and African Pipit as well as Common Quail and Grey-Francolin.

3.

Pentad Number: 3430_1945

Pentad Name: Pietersieliefontein

Habitat: Cultivated land with farm dams, alien forests and the Pietersieliekloof river with marshes. Elim Nature Reserve has fynbos.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 3

Project Species Number: 76

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 8

SABAP2 Species Number: 97

Comments: This pentad delivered 4 Cuckoo's (Diderick, Klaas's, Red-chested and Black) on one day! Also, the first African Goshawk record of the project.

4.

Pentad Number: 3430_1950

Pentad Name: Kosierskraal

Habitat: Natural fynbos, alien forests, cultivated land and the Soetmuis mountains southern slope. The Kastaingskloof river runs through pentad.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 8

Project Species Number: 110

Species Reported not confirmed: 4

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 12

SABAP2 Species Number: 106

Comments: This pentad keeps producing rarities and this year the highlight were Black Cuckoo, Amur Falcon, Black Sparrow-hawk, Verreaux's Eagle (the last 2 local rarities).

5.

Pentad Number: 3430_1955

Pentad Name: Graskloof

Habitat: Southern slopes of the Soetmuis mountain with natural fynbos, alien forests, cultivated land, some large farm dams.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 6

Project Species Number: 92

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 7

SABAP2 Species Number: 94

Comments: Highlight was another Greater Honeyguide for the Plain. The Berg-en-Dam Cottage on the farm gives access to the most beautiful kloof in the Plain.

6.

Pentad Number: 3430_2000

Pentad Name: Bredasdorp

Habitat: Urban area, Bredasdorp sewerage works, cultivated land, Heuningberg Nature reserve on Soetmuis mountain.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 4

Project Species Number: 38

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 36

SABAP2 Species Number: 141

Comments: This pentad has not been formally recorded as a small portion falls within the Agulhas Plain and it is well covered by locals.

7.

Pentad Number: 3430_2005

Pentad Name: Nachtwacht

Habitat: Cultivated land, The beautiful Nachtwacht Restaurant Garden, fynbos chalk dunes, Kars river with marshes.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 4

Project Species Number: 65

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 9

SABAP2 Species Number: 102

Comments: Highlights was the first Lesser Striped Swallow recorded in the Agulhas Plain. Also, the furthest Westward recorded in the Western Cape(SABAP). In January, the second Spotted Flycatcher was recorded in the Plain!

8.

Pentad Number: 3435_1935

Pentad Name: Nuwedam

Habitat: Natural fynbos and proteaceae, Alien forest, cultivated land, the large dam at Nuwedam and marsh land.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 8

Project Species Number: 104

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 10

SABAP2 Species Number: 112

Comments: The habitat in this pentad has changed dramatically with the removal of aliens on the farm Nuwedam.

9.

Pentad Number: 3435_1940

Pentad Name: Viljoenshof

Habitat: Alien forests, large patches of proteaceae(farming), natural fynbos, origin of the Ratel river, Viljoenshof marsh land and Wolfgat and other small dams.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 7

Project Species Number: 77

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 11

SABAP2 Species Number: 97

Comments: The marshes in the Ratel river in and around Viljoenshof is the most exciting area to visit. The upper origins of the Ratel river needs more attention. Alien deforestation has been very successful and the area has largely regained its natural beauty.

10.

Pentad Number: 3435_1945

Pentad Name: Elim

Habitat: Cultivate land, Nuwejaars river and marsh lands, Waschkraalvlei, Strandveld dam with marsh. Natural fynbos

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 11

Project Species Number: 124

Species Reported not confirmed: 3

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 24

SABAP2 Species Number: 156

Comments: This pentad was neglected this year due to workload, but the challenge remains to identify Marsh Owl at Waschkraalvlei. The highlights of the year were African and Greater Painted Snipe seen at Waschkraalvlei.

11.

Pentad Number: 3435_1950

Pentad Name: Bo-Voelvlei

Habitat: Nuwejaars river and marshes, Langpan, Rondepan and Northern third of Voelvlei. Cultivated land, natural fynbos and alien forest.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 7

Project Species Number: 123

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 19

SABAP2 Species Number: 145

Comments: The Elandsdrift part of Voelvllei remains one of the best for birding. This pentad could also deliver African Grass-owl and Marsh Owl, especially along the Nuwejaars river.

12.

Pentad Number: 3435_1955

Pentad Name: Heuningrug

Habitat: Largely cultivated land with the natural fynbos Heuningrug taking up most of the habitat. Small farm dams and 2/3's of Rondepan.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 8

Project Species Number: 116

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 14

SABAP2 Species Number: 130

Comments: The Heuningrug in this pentad needs to be explored but the track is not great and damaging to vehicles.

13.

Pentad Number: 3435_2000

Pentad Name: Grooteiland

Habitat: Cultivated land, large wetland area due to Kars river ending in flat plain, Varkvlei, Manmade canals made to drain the area towards Heuningnes river. Small patches fynbos and alien forest.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 10

Project Species Number: 124

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 37

SABAP2 Species Number: 148

Comments: One of the most exciting pentads in the Agulhas Plain!

14.

Pentad Number: 3435_2005

Pentad Name: Princekraal

Habitat: The Kars river ends in a delta in this pentad which forms a wetland before it forms again into the Kars river in the Grooteiland pentad. Largely cultivated land with patches of gumtree forests. Water canals deviated from the Kars river runs to Vogelgezang and feeds into this wetland.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 9

Project Species Number: 110

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 41

SABAP2 Species Number: 154

Comments: The Kars river delta is still largely unexplored for this project and the view of the African Grass-owl in this pentad must be the highlight of the year.

15.

Pentad Number: 3440_1935

Pentad Name: Waterford

Habitat: Coastal fynbos, Northern Buffelsjagtbaai coast, Maccaovlei, alien forest, Haelkraal river and Koks river with marsh land feeding Ratel river.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 6

Project Species Number: 87

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 13

SABAP2 Species Number: 110

Comments: The Maccao vlei produced African Rail, African Snipe and Black Crake and hundreds of coots, ducks, geese and flamingos. This area should be prioritized for a bird hide.

16.

Pentad Number: 3440_1940

Pentad Name: Wolvengat

Habitat: The Ratel river marsh lands, Soetwaterfontein, cultivated land, Uintjiekuil pan, Uintjiekuil dam, Alien forest patches, rehabilitated fynbos/marshes Ratel river plain. Wolvengat semi-urban area.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 9

Project Species Number: 121

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 17

SABAP2 Species Number: 129

Comments: The discovery of the Uintjieskuil pan and Buff-spotted Flufftail in Uintjieskuil river is the highlight of this pentad. The rehabilitation of the Ratel river plain is just such a good story! Well done to the "Work for water" teams! Greater Honeyguide is now a regular ID in this pentad.

17.

Pentad Number: 3440_1945

Pentad Name: Rietfontein

Habitat: Cultivated land, alien tree patches, Uintjieskuil and river, small patches natural fynbos, Melkbospan and vlei and Vispan (salt pan).

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 10

Project Species Number: 127

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 16

SABAP2 Species Number: 143

Comments: This pentad has recovered very well and much of the vegetation could be too high for H Buttonquail now. It proved to be very productive for Cape Clapper Lark this year.

18.

Pentad Number: 3440_1950

Pentad Name: Voelvlei

Habitat: Natural fynbos Soetansberg, Voelvlei, some seasonal pans, cultivated land, 4 dams West of Springfield Saltpan and Western edge of the Saltpan. Small portion of the Nuwejaars river wetland.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 9

Project Species Number: 117

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 23

SABAP2 Species Number: 141

Comments: This pentad has varying habitats and is probably one of the most exciting in the Agulhas Plain. This is the only pentad that has produced Sentinel Rock Thrush(Soetansberg). The Voelvlei can produce almost any water bird depending on the level of the vlei.

19.

Pentad Number: 3440_1955

Pentad Name: Zoetendalsvlei

Habitat: Zoetendals vlei, Nuwejaars river wetland, Springfield Saltpan, Cultivated land and renosterveld.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 17

Project Species Number: 154

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 51

SABAP2 Species Number: 178

Comments: This pentad is second only to De Mond in species numbers. This is the most beautiful and varied habitat and delivers on almost any water bird. This year produced the first Little Bittern for the Zoetendalsvlei.

20.

Pentad Number:3440_2000

Pentad Name: Klipfontein

Habitat: Most of the Heuningnes river, cultivated land, various small pans and natural fynbos. Southern part of the De Mond Nature Reserve. Andrews Field Nature reserve fynbos with coastal dunes.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 15

Project Species Number: 133

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 31

SABAP2 Species Number: 167

Comments: This pentad is one of the most lucrative in the Agulhas Plain mostly because it includes the Heuningnes river, but also has the best habitat for the elusive Hottentot Buttonquail. Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk which is rare in the Plain, was the most interesting ID.

21.

Pentad Number:3440_2005

Pentad Name: De Mond

Habitat: De Mond Estuary and Nature Reserve, Vogelgezang wetlands, Coastal dunes and cultivated land.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 11

Project Species Number: 156

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 137

SABAP2 Species Number: 213

Comments: Highlight for the year was an Osprey, Red Knot, Black Cuckooshrike and Pacific Golden Plover recorded. Extensive birding was done in this pentad to catch up on statistics for this pentad which improved the species count dramatically. A further highlight was early in December when approx. 30 000 terns and 7 000 Cormorants were counted (with the use of panoramic pictures) on that day.

22.

Pentad Number: 3445_1935

Pentad Name: Quoin Point

Habitat: Coastal fynbos with areas of aliens. Quoin Rock falls in this pentad.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 5

Project Species Number: 72

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 10

SABAP2 Species Number: 98

Comments: This is mostly nature reserve and almost all aliens have been removed which has transform the area. There seems to be a breeding pair of Black Harrier in the area, but the area will always be visited for a guaranteed view of Bank Cormorant and perhaps Crowned Cormorant.

23.

Pentad Number: 3445_1940

Pentad Name: Die Dam

Habitat: Coastal fynbos with small pans. Ratel river marsh last km before the mouth.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 5

Project Species Number: 90

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 10

SABAP2 Species Number: 96

Comments: Access to this pentad limited since closing of the coastal track at Die Dam.

24.

Pentad Number: 3445_1945

Pentad Name: Rietfontein se Baai

Habitat: Coastal fynbos and dune veld. Drie Vleitjies pans.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 5

Project Species Number: 66

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 7

SABAP2 Species Number: 97

Comments: Removal of aliens almost complete. Coastal birding and not much else. Good Hottentot Buttonquail habitat.

25.

Pentad Number:3445_1950

Pentad Name: Brandfontein

Habitat: Fynbos and Dune veld. Soetanyberg southern slopes. Wetlands in valley below Soetany.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 7

Project Species Number: 88

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 18

SABAP2 Species Number:129

Comments: Good spot for Streaky-headed Seedeater. Could deliver Marsh Owl and Ground Woodpecker in future.

26.

Pentad Number: 3445_ 1955

Pentad Name: Suiderstrand

Habitat: Coastal Duneveld, Fynbos and Renoster pan, Sandberg. Ryspunt peninsula.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project:13

Project Species Number: 131

Species Reported not confirmed: 0

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 43

SABAP2 Species Number:163

Comments: The Ryspunt walkway towards the Tern Roost very productive. Sandberg for Hottentot Buttonquail and Orange-breasted Sunbird. This pentad produced the biggest scorecard of the year (99 species). Renosterpan should be considered for a Bird hide.

Highlights for the pentad was African Harrier-Hawk, Baillon's Crake, Forrest Buzzard and Wattled Starling.

27.

Pentad Number:3445_2000

Pentad Name: Struisbaai

Habitat: Urban area surrounded by natural fynbos, coastal dune veld and Langerzandt Wetland.

Checklists submitted to SABAP for Project: 20

Project Species Number: 155

Species Reported not confirmed: 1

Checklists submitted to SABAP total: 68

SABAP2 Species Number: 173

Comments: This pentad had some great surprises. African Rail, Cardinal and Knysna Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Secretary Bird and Water Thicknee were new species for the pentad.

CHALLENGES for 2017

It has become a challenge to cover all 27 pentads in one year as I am on average only once a month in Struisbaai. For this reason, the appointment of Erica Brink as conservation officer will be a great asset as she could be utilized in recording the more Western Pentads of the Nuwejaars river SMA. In the same vein, Lindsay Lewis, Western Section ranger AGNP could be approached to increase the data for the Western Agulhas Plain.

It seems that the legally acceptable way to collect funds for bird hide development will require that the Agulhas Birding Project register as NGO, which means it must be audited. This will also make it easier for corporates to sponsor the project.

The Langerzandt Wetland is currently under pressure due to further development of Langerzandt. Contact has been established with the developer who has responded positively and would like our input with regard the wetland.

The Agulhas National Park and Nuwejaars river SMA, are more interested in Mybirdpatch records as this is more relevant to them for marketing. What they need to know is e.g.: what species occur at Voelvllei or Zoetendalsvlei or Renosterpan or at Ryspunt Peninsula or on a specific farm such as Visserdrift. Most of these attractions though are covered by

more than one pentad. So, for 2017, the strategy will be to record using MYBIRDPATCH primarily.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to believe that after 7 years we are still identifying new species in the Agulhas Plain in such large numbers. This surely cannot go on forever. It is however realistic to target 5 new species for 2017. Target species for 2017 will be:

Eurasian Hobby

Rufous-cheeked Nightjar (please call me if you hear them calling)

African Quail finch

Sweet Waxbill(one record so far)

Baillon's Crake(one record heard only)

Spotted Crake

Cape Penduline-Tit

Cape Rock-Thrush

Cape Siskin

European Bee-eater

European Honey-Buzzard(One record)

Great Egret

Ground Woodpecker

Jacobin Cuckoo

Karoo Korhaan

Lemon Dove

Little Sparrow-hawk

Marsh Owl(Waschkraalvlei)

Sand Martin and

Willow Warbler.

Please be on the lookout for the new Agulhasplainbirding.com website!

We ask all interested parties to be on the lookout for strange species and report them asap. Please contact me at:

doc@agulhasplainbirding.co.za or

Cell: 0828070904(SMS or call me)

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Yours

Wim de Klerk