



# **AGULHAS PLAIN BIRDING PROJECT**

## **Birds of the Agulhas Plain Biosphere**

### **YEARLY REPORT 2020**

**This report is a requirement of an agreement with Agulhas National Park and Nuwejaars Wetland SMA at the start of the project 10 years ago.**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In December 2019 the Agulhas Plain Birding Project has officially come to an end – at least that was the intention! We had data of the past 10 years which needed attention and the goals for 2020 was set as:

#### **GOALS FOR 2020**

1. “clean” data collected. By this I mean checking that all data is reliable and removing that which is doubtful.
2. See Prof Ryan at Fitzpatrick Institute for advice on way forward with data collected.
3. Analyse data collected. Begin to write up the comparison with historical data.
4. Focussed birding, addressing weaknesses in data.
5. Publish findings of the Agulhas Plain Birding Project

#### **SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS 2020:**

1. I visited Prof Ryan who advised me on how to write up the project.
2. Before this could happen however, I began “cleaning up” the data, making sure that all records correlate with SABAP2. All outstanding out of range forms was followed up and either accepted or discarded. Where there was doubt a record was rather discarded than accepted.
3. The issue of the Pipits of the Agulhas Plain had to be solved and after consultation with Faansie Peacock and scrutinizing all available pictures, it was decided to delete all records of Nicholson Pipits as these were most likely juvenile African Pipit.
4. I began writing up the data as advised comparing the project data with that of SABAP1 and Robinson et al 1957. Immediately this began to raise further questions, which lead to:
5. Focussed birding outings – searching for question mark species. This was done following the previous protocol. I ended up continuing with the original protocol and finished surveying all 27 pentads as in every other year! Special attention was given to Rock-thrushes, Warblers, Crakes, Grass-owl and of course, Pipits.
6. We started our search for other breeding sights for African Grass-owl, but so far has found none. We started by covering the similar habitat next to the existing

- Nachtwacht sight but found nothing. This project will now be widened to other areas.
7. We completed 33 full protocol cards and 14 ad Hoc. These will not form part of the project but will be continued in future and used in future research. We were able to get winter and summer counts better distributed as well.
  8. I aimed to finish with writing by Dec 2020, but found myself not even half way there. This was because of the amount of data but also because of a work related issues mostly due to Covid. At current rate I should be able to finish by Dec 2021.
  9. Two new species was recorded for the Agulhas Plain in 2020. Eugene Hahndinck recorded the first Karoo Korhaan near Bredasdorp and Pieter Verster a Squacco Heron on the farm Zoetendalsvlei. This brought the total number of species identified so far in the Agulhas Plain to 277!
  10. Other significant observations in 2020 was:
    - a. Cape Rock Thrush at Sparrekloof
    - b. Spotted Flycatcher seen by Eugene Hahndinck at Nuwejaars SMA and one seen at Nachtwacht
    - c. African Spoonbill breeding colony Kocksrivier
    - d. Ground Woodpecker in Agulhas
    - e. Goliath Heron at Zeekoeivlei
    - f. First inland record of Black Oystercatcher
    - g. Cape Penduline Tit - first picture record
    - h. Temmincks Courser seen at Blomfontein by Liohan Gilliomee
    - i. First (Excellent) picture of Red-chested Flufftail taken by Pieter le Roux.
    - j. Greater and Lesser Sand Plover seen at De Mond on one day!
  11. We recorded 203 species in 2020 which is an 5% increase on the previous year and an indication of the improved rainfall since 2019.
  12. The close working relation with Rangers at ANP, Cape Nature and Nuwejaars SMA and improved. This was highlighted when the project was able to provide birding aid in the form of 10 Roberts Birds of South Africa ID apps for ten rangers/managers of the ANP, De Mond and Bredasdorp Eco Rangers. This was received enthusiastically and has already made a difference at ground level.
  13. The Langerzandt estate has been neglected last year due to time constraints, but Arisa Voges promised me that they are working at it.
  14. I actively started using Facebook to share the work of the project. This lead to the series: Memorable Moments which highlighted the history of the project and some highs and lows. At one stage reached more than 1000 birders!

## **CONCLUSION**

With the ending of the Agulhas Plain Birding Project I presumed that Yearly reports are no longer required, but pressure from Emmerentia de Kock to continue has lead to this rather late report. I hope this gives some insight of the work still done by all involved in birding in the Agulhas Plain!

WIM DE KLERK

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AGULHAS PLAIN BIRDING PROJECT.