



AGULHAS PLAIN BIRDING PROJECT

Birds of the Agulhas Plain Biosphere

REPORT 2021-2022

This report is a requirement of an agreement with Agulhas National Park and Nuwejaars Wetland SMA at the start of the project 12 years ago.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2019 the Agulhas Plain Birding Project has officially had to end. This practically never happened as certain short-comings had to be addressed. Some of these had been addressed in 2020 but further work was still required :

PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRED ATTENTION:

1. Further “cleaning” of data. Many rarities submitted to SABAP was still outstanding
2. Collection of research documents from Fitzpatrick Institute.
3. Many pentads required winter surveys with the aim to have at least 50% as winter counts
4. Focussed birding. Information on secretive species such as Grass-Owl and Flufftail were lacking which required some hard footwork.
5. Writing of the thesis: Birds of the Agulhas Plain Biosphere. A Comparison of Historical Data.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS 2021-2022:

1. Further historical data on Agulhas Plain discovered(Bickerton 1983, Summers 1979 and CWAC counts) was found to be used in thesis.
2. A further 65 surveys covering all of the pentads were done in 2021 and 2022.
3. Importantly, at the end of 2022, all pentads had at least 50% of surveys done in winter. This fixed the goal of increasing winter counts.
4. All bird names were adjusted to new international nomenclature.
5. An 15 min online Agulhas Plain Birding video was compiled for the SA Birdlife Bird fair. This elicited widespread interest in birding this area.
6. I was invited to deliver an online lecture on Birding in the Agulhas Plain for SA Birdlife program “Conservation conversations”. This is still available online as Youtube video and regularly attracts visitors from all over the globe to the region. This is confirmed by the regular calls I get for further information on birding in the area.
7. Much of the past two years were taken up by owl surveys. Methodology used were based on that provided by experienced researchers in Gauteng. The roping method were used to survey the wetlands between De Mond and Nachtwacht.

This led to the discovery of the first record of Marsh Owl in the Agulhas Plain and was followed up by a second record near Nachtwacht. It also revealed a large population of Red-breasted Flufftail in this wetland. No new breeding sites of Afr Grass-owl were found in this wetland but a new site was found on the farm Kosierskraal. It also appeared that Cape Nature had historical records of Grass owl at De Mond Nature Reserve, although this could not yet be confirmed.

8. An incredible 12 new species were recorded for the Agulhas Plain in the past two years:
 - a. In Jan 2021 Liohan Gilliomme saw a **Franklin's Gull** circling his combine harvester
 - b. Then in May 2021 Merle Chalton found a Greater Shearwater at De Mond blown in by a heavy storm.
 - c. Also in May Gary Hayman saw the much visited Whinchat near Princekraal. This rarity had twitchers flying in from all over the country.
 - d. Alida Hoefmann photographed the first Southern Giant Petrel in Struisbaai harbour in June.
 - e. On the 8th of November 2021 Jeremy Mann produced a picture of Great White Egret seen at Waschkraal
 - f. Fraser Chrighton on Birding Big Day photographed the first White-backed Duck(Nov)
 - g. On 12th Dec Steve James reported the first Eurasian Hobby and
 - h. On 15th I found the first Cape Siskin on the Tierfontein Conservancy.
 - i. Alistair Kilpin saw a Common Scimitarbill at De Mond Early in 2022.
 - j. Steve James photographed a Fulvous Whistling Duck at Earth Restaurant also in January.
 - k. In March Dana Goldberg photographed the first Elegant Tern at De Mond.
 - l. In March I recorded the first Marsh Owl near De Mond Farms.
 - m.
9. We have now reached 290 species for the Agulhas Plain and are closing in on the magical 300! May this continue!
10. The Langerzandt Wetland deteriorated with massive plastic pollution. In December 2022 I approached their management who offered two men to help us. I hired another man and the four man team started at 08h00 on 28th Dec. and removed 32 black bags of plastic pollution from the wetland in a 6 hour haul. The community has to be involved in future to keep this wetland clean.
11. The Agulhas Plain Birding Facebook now has nearly 800 followers and often articles reaches as many as 1000 – 1500 visitors. This has proven to be an excellent marketing tool for birding in the Agulhas Plain raising awareness of the area as birding destination.
12. Even though the thesis has come some way, it has proven to be much more of a challenge than anticipated. Hopefully 2023 will provide the time to complete the task at hand!

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 led 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!

Co-ordinator

AGULHAS PLAIN BIRDING PROJECT.