

Village Life

CAPE OVERBERG WHALE COAST

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Rare sea creature found



Many people have one of the fragile shells of the paper nautilus in their possession. But finding a live female in her shell is a rare occurrence, even for scientists. Then, in May, this perfect specimen was found in a rock pool at Kleinbaai near Gansbaai.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANNATJIE KRÜGEL

The female *Argonauta argo*. The flaps on two of the tentacles are used to manufacture the shell.

The paper nautilus is in fact the species *Argonauta argo*, the largest and most common member of the family *Argonautidae*. It is closely related to octopuses and squids, but only very distantly to the pearly nautilus, which belongs to a subclass of cephalopods that split off about 470 million years ago.

Argonauta is a pelagic species, drifting near the surface of the open ocean in tropical and sub-tropical regions. In South Africa they are brought down the eastern coast by the Mocambique Current as far as L'Agulhas, but shells are then often washed ashore further north along the western coastline as far as Betty's Bay, usually in April and May. More

shells than usual have been found this year and last, according to people at Struisbaai and L'Agulhas. No final explanation has been given for the larger numbers, but it is probably related to changes in sea temperatures.

The *Argonauta* is a rare species in many ways. Over the millennia it first lost its origi-

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The first people who settled at the present Gansbaai just over a century ago were fishermen who built their simple homes close to the sea. The town is preparing for its annual winter festival, and we take a look at the early days - page 4.

Birding Route for Overberg

The Overberg, home to an amazing variety of bird species, is to get its own Birding Route to encourage avi-tourism in the area. This exciting project by Birdlife Overberg will include the training of members of local previously disadvantaged communities as bird guides. And veteran photographer Nico Myburgh tells us about one of the "fynbos specials", the Victorin's Warbler - page 6.

Have you heard about the extinct volcano outside Napier? - page 8.

Some residents of the Overstrand have reason to be fed up with the trouble caused by baboons. We take a look at man's place in the natural scheme of things - page 11.

Would you like to wear your heart on your sleeve... uh, chest? VILLAGE LIFE is launching a range of T-shirts with Overberg themes, some of them light-hearted, others pretty or elegant. Details and an order form are on page 9.

■ For our archive and background information, visit www.villagelife.co.za



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