

Village Life

JOURNAL OF THE CAPE OVERBERG

NO 8 ■ OCT/NOV 2004 ■ R6,00 INCL VAT



Do boats scare our whales?

Boat-based whale-watching has been the subject of controversy at times, with people fearing that the whales may be disturbed by the boats. Rudy Hughes, who received the first permit for such an operation, tells us about the research that was undertaken to establish permissible practices – page 3.

The old limestone buildings at Rietfontein are burnt down – page 2.

The journey along the Old Cape Wagon Road takes us to Swellendam, where travellers had to find ways of crossing the Breede River. Simon Streicher has located every ford and ferry in the district – page 4.

Thandi at Elgin shows that a black empowerment enterprise can be fair and successful – page 5.

The historic Strandveld farm Ratelrivier had its share of sorrow in its early days. Read about the strange events surrounding the death of Jacoba Alida van Breda – page 8 & 9.

Renosterveld, which at a distance may look drab and grey, contains a wealth of plant life. A programme is underway to try and save the last remaining patches of this “Cinderella” – page 10.

The activities behind the fences at the Overberg Test Range aren't all geared for technology and warfare; it is also a conservation area – page 11.

And new on the menu: Get your healthy vegetables from the sea, rather than the soil – page 12.

■ We often have more material – especially photographs – than we can fit onto the available number of pages, and will in future publish some of this on our website. The popularity of the site is growing all the time, having attracted more than 6 000 visits in August. It also contains background information, summaries of our archives and many useful links. Visit us soon at www.villagelife.co.za



Nature conservation, tourism and development in the Overberg are getting a major boost with the launch of the Overberg Birding Route and the first phase of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI). As a welcome to visitors to the Stanford Birding Fair 8–10 October, we feature the work of veteran bird photographer Nico Myburgh, who took this stunning photograph of a Black Eagle (now renamed Verreaux's Eagle), one of almost 350 bird species in the region. See pages 6 & 7.

Agulhas initiative on track

The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI), a comprehensive plan for the conservation and development of the Strandveld, is at the start of its first five-year cycle. At the end of this period, it is envisaged that the whole process will be in the hands of local people. And one day rhinoceros and hippopotami may again walk free in the region.

ABI is a partnership between South African National Parks and Fauna & Flora International initiated by Cape Action for People and the Environment (CAPE), in its turn a partnership programme led by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Its aim is the conservation of the Cape Floral Kingdom and thereby to deliver sustainable economic benefits to the people of the region.

SANParks identified the Agulhas Plain as a prime conservation area about 20 years ago, but the whole process of implementing its plans has taken longer than ever expected. The Agulhas National Park (ANP) was proclaimed in 1999 with land of 100 ha around the Agulhas lighthouse, which has been expanded to 20 000 ha through the purchase of farms in the coastal strip between Quoin Point and Cape Agulhas. The eventual

goal is a conservation area of 120 000 ha, comprising roughly a triangle bounded by the coastline from Die Dam to Struisbaai; along the R317 to Heuningberg at Bredasdorp; and back along the R317 to Die Dam. Long-term expansion may include linking eastwards with De Mond Nature Reserve, northward to include the Elim-Hagelkraal-Heuningrug node, and the establishment of a marine reserve.

“Although we have spent about R52 million in the area, it has not cost the South African taxpayer a cent,” says Mr Etienne Fourie, manager of ANP. “Part of it came from internal funding by SANParks, from for instance the sale of game; the rest from international sources such as the Global Environ-

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9 771810 558005 ISSN 1810-5580 No 8

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