

Newsletter



GROTTO BAY PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE



Beautiful One Day - Perfect The Next

September 2024 Newsletter

Letter From the Editor Jacqui Miller

Apologies for the scarcity of the newsletter of late, my paying job has been very demanding of late!

Hopefully, we are seeing the end of winter and its devastating floods in and around Cape Town. The good news is that all our dams are 100% or more in most cases. This, I'm sure, will also bring a bumper wildflower season. Our wild animals seem to be thriving and we hope to see some little ones appearing in Spring. We still need to be mindful of water usage as we don't know what summer will bring.

Welcome to all the new residents to Grotto Bay, we hope you will be very happy here.

Spring is time to renew your garden

September tends to be very hot and dry, so watering will need to be increased, always adhering to water restrictions. Be water-wise and spread a layer of mulch around plants or grow a water wise groundcover in all beds and borders to retain moisture, suppress weed growth and keep plants' roots cool. Remember to plant from the approved list of plants.

In your veggie garden sow in situ: beans, Swiss chard, pumpkin, gem squash, sweet corn, baby marrow, carrot, turnips, radish and beetroot. Plant seedlings of cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and the tubers of potato and sweet potato.

Hot tip: Basil and tomatoes are good companions. The basil keeps the aphids, fruit flies and beetles away from the tomatoes and is said to enhance their flavour.



SA National Parks Week – free entry

The 19th annual SA National Parks Week will be held from 9 to 13 September 2024 and extended to 14 and 15 September at selected national parks. All South African citizens get in free.

SanParks uses this week to promote pride in South Africa's natural, cultural, and historical heritage preserved by the national parks system.

History of the West Coast National Park

Originally proclaimed the Langebaan National Park in 1985 and renamed in 1988, the West Coast National Park is located 100 km (62 miles) north of Cape Town, just south of Saldanha Bay. The nature park covers 38 000 hectares, of which the Langebaan lagoon takes up 5 600 hectares.

About 30 km (18.6 miles) of the national park's western boundary is formed by the Atlantic Ocean and there is a narrow stretch of land, just 2 km (1.24 miles) wide and 15 km (9.3 miles) long separating the ocean and the lagoon.

The landscape of the nature reserve is predominantly flat or slightly undulating with sand dunes found along the coast. Near to the dunes at Geelbek one will find a number of mammalian fossil rich calcrete areas, all dating back to 5 000 000BP. These remains include fossils of sabre-toothed cats, short-necked giraffes and four-tusked elephants.

The most easily recognizable relics are the stone fish traps, and large 'kitchen' middens left behind by the Khoikhoi. A set of fossilized human footprints, thought to be over 115 000 years old were also found in the reserve and are now preserved in a museum. A historically rich area, the Oudepost 1 at Kraalbaai is said to be the location where the first meeting between officials from the Dutch East India Company and the local Khoi took place.

The nature park's vegetation is dominated by the Cape Floral Kingdom and each year after the winter rains the visitors are met with a magnificent display of annually flowering plants blanketing the landscape. Yellow Daisy-bush, Proteas, Milkbush and Yellow Milk-bush are just some of the plants that make up the blossoming display and the rich diversity of flowers has been split into 36 different botanical communities.

The West Coast National Park with its extremely rich bird life and wonderful diversity of marine organisms is one of the most beautiful coastal wetlands in South Africa. Game viewing in the Postberg section of the reserve can also be highly rewarding.

BirdLife SA's 2024 Bird of the Year

By Liz Clarke - edited

BirdLife South Africa has just chosen the bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) as its Bird of the Year for 2024 and it is interesting to learn that there's still some debate about whether there is a connection to the Zimbabwean emblem.

The bateleur is famous not only for its striking regal appearance but also for its remarkable aerial behaviour. The sad news is that, despite the bold, majestic, strong image, these birds are classified as regionally endangered, with an estimated population reduction of more than 50% over the past three generations (40 years). All that's left is a regional population of fewer than 1,000 mature individuals.

Home for this eye-catching bird of prey, with its distinctive plumage — a combination of black, white and vibrant red-orange on the face and legs — is the bushveld of the Kruger National Park and the arid Kalahari Desert.

The decrease in numbers is suspected to be because of habitat transformation, which has led to a shortage of available prey.



The bateleur. (Photo: Chris van Rooyen)

The bateleur's tendency to scavenge puts the species at particular risk from indiscriminate poisoning, especially by small-stock farmers. Illegal harvesting of the species for the muthi trade is another recent trend, one that BirdLife South Africa believes needs to be further investigated.

The name bateleur was coined by famed French explorer, writer, ornithologist, and Africa's foremost bird species specialist in the 18th century François Levaillant, and is said to be French for a "tumbler" or "tightrope walker", which aptly describes the bird's graceful aerial acrobatics.

Now that we know trees talk to each other and that maybe we can talk to them, what on earth should we talk about?

03.2024 | Peter Dearlove - edited

Scientists are said to be on the brink of unlocking the secret ways in which trees keep in touch with each other. In this reality check, we take a quirky look at the idea and think about a useful agenda.

It is official, or almost anyway: trees talk to each other. Highly respected scientists are telling us that research has proven trees have a unique but recognizable way of communicating certain facts of tree life to one another, even when out of earshot. Exactly what the trees are saying remains to be learned. However, there are serious suggestions now on the table that further scientific research will unlock their language, and those able to learn it can look forward to some fascinating conversations.

In this blossoming green age when there is so much concentration on nature and our need to respect it, the tree talk topic comes as no great surprise, but it does raise the question: does grass talk too? And what about garden plants? And the weeds? These and others like them are likely to be among the first of many interesting posers we can put to the forest when we have cracked that first ground-breaking code.

Did you know?

Google Images came about due to a dress Jennifer Lopes wore to the Grammys.

Earth's tallest waterfall is underwater beneath the Denmark Strait.

The word queue is just a q followed by 4 silent letters.

A cloud weighs around a million tonnes.

Earth's rotation is changing speed, it's actually slowing down.

Water might not be wet. This is because most scientists define wetness as a liquid's ability to maintain contact with a solid surface, meaning that water itself is not wet, but can make other objects wet.

Your signature could reveal personality traits. There are more bacterial cells in your body than human cells.

Lego bricks withstand compression better than concrete.

Some interspecies relationships that evolved in nature

So as many of us dwell on the ingredients of a good relationship, we explore some other unusual – yet wildly successful – couples of the animal and plant kingdom that could give humanity some romantic inspiration.



Ostriches and zebras

Ostriches have poor eyesight, but smell well. Zebras see well but have a terrible sense of smell. They're a match made in heaven and it's a pairing that has been appreciated since Darwin's first records. They're often spotted together on the African plains, and they help each other out by combining their senses to alert one another to predators.

Clover roots and sugar-munching bacteria

Legumes, such as beans, peas, chickpeas and clover, form a symbiotic relationship with bacteria that can fix nitrogen from the air, and turn it into ammonia – which the plants then convert into protein and use to grow. It's a mutually beneficial relationship that is around 60 million years old. In return for the bacteria's support, the plant houses the bacteria in root nodules – tiny pinkish balls – and provides them with sugars and oxygen so they too can grow. So next time you're weeding and pull out a clover, have a look at the roots and marvel at this ancient partnership.



Safety First

With summer comes swimming season. Be careful of rip-currents, especially during full moon when the seas can be rougher than normal. Unfortunately, it's where it looks easiest and safest to enter the sea. This is because the rip current is looping around and pulling back out. Hence no waves rolling in. NEVER ENTER THE SEA HERE. If you are already in the sea and get caught in a rip-current (you'll know because you will suddenly be moved from your location, and it will be impossible to swim against it) don't panic. Swim ACROSS, not against the rip current.

For example, rather than trying to swim to shore while being pushed out, swim parallel to the beach and you will be able to get out of it. Then you can swim ashore.

Easier said than done, I know, but it's your best option.



Summer also brings warmer weather, which in turn brings out our snakes in the estate. If you see one, back off slowly and move away. Our 3 most venomous ones are the Cape Cobra, the Puff Adder and the Boomslang. If one gets into your house, or too close for comfort in your garden, call the estate manager who will arrange to have it relocated. Do NOT kill it.

Bird Ringers

Last Saturday, the Bird Ringers were active in Grotto Bay again. Many birds were humanely caught, measured, ringed, and the data captured to go into an international database. It was a very interesting morning.

Did you know that the white ring around the eye of a Cape White Eye is made up of tiny white feathers and in the Cape Bulbul, it is caused by white skin around the eye?



Southern Double Collared Sunbird



Chestnut Vented Warbler



Cape Penduline Tit

Spring Beach Clean Up.

Thank you to everyone who went down to the beaches this past weekend to collect a bag or more, to make a dent in the debris on our beaches. It is very much appreciated. Please try and take a bag with you each time you go for a walk on the beaches or in the reserve. This is an ongoing battle!

Every little bit helps.

Table Tennis Challenge and Braai



Thank you to Sharon & Craig Doré for organizing this fun event last Sunday. A Round Robin tournament was held with 2 table tennis tables in action, with an A & B division at play. The winner of the B division was Bianca, and the A division was Dylan.

Well done to you two! We hope this will become an annual event with the floating trophy up for grabs again next year.

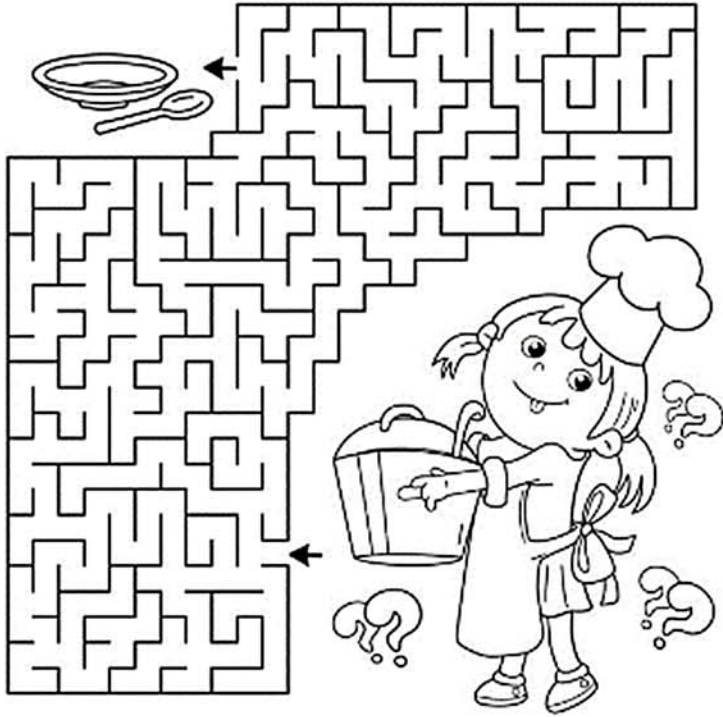
How about a Volleyball Challenge on the beach too?



Funnies

My mother used to tell me that I was the world's greatest potato peeler, and I really bought into it. Every time we had potatoes, I was so excited to show off my skills as the ultimate peeler. It wasn't until I was in my mid-30s, I realized the whole play. Touché mom, touché!
 Bread is a lot like the sun, it rises in the yeast and sets in the waist.

Kid's Corner

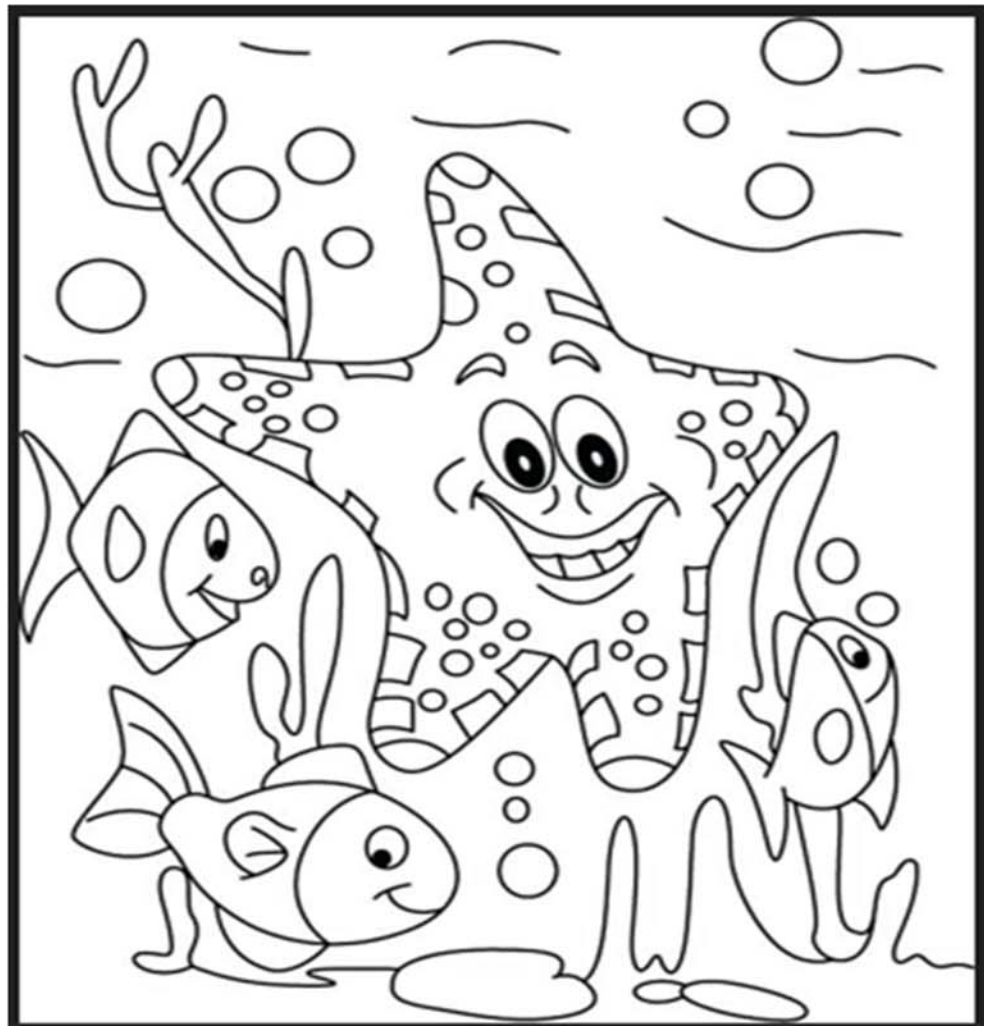


Quiz

1. I have wings and I have a tail, across the sky is where I sail. Yet I have no eyes, ears, or mouth, and I bob randomly from north to south. What am I?
2. I look like you except I have a tail, I am a good tree climber. I can mimic you very easily. I eat fruits, insects and flowers. My favorite food is bananas. What am I?
3. I have wings and I have a tail, across the sky is where I sail. Yet I have no eyes, ears, or mouth, and I bob randomly from north to south. What am I?
4. I might be tiny but I can lift things that are about 5000 times my weight, if I want to climb a tower that is tall and mighty. What am I?
5. I'm too big to be a pet, I might be large with a small head, but once I've seen something I'll never forget. Who am I?
6. When in water, I use my flippers to glide and on snow, on my belly I'll slide. What am I?

Find the answers to these questions somewhere in the newsletter.

Colour me in





In the Kitchen - Baked Brie with hanepoot-caramelised pears

The container in which you bake it needs to be barely millimetres wider than the Brie itself, otherwise it will flow as it melts. Use a small glass pie dish, which is almost too big but there is minimal flow, as it were. The result is a bowl of cheesy delight. Toasted almonds added crunch and a counterpoint to the sweetness of the pears, and thyme gave the dish a subtle herbiness.

Method

Chop and toast the almonds.

Slice the dried pears into thin slivers. Put them in a bowl with the hanepoot and leave to steep for half an hour.

Pour the pears and hanepoot into a saucepan, bring to a boil, and simmer them until the pears are soft and there is half of the liquid left. Set aside.

Spray the base and sides of a suitable vessel in which to bake the Brie. Place the cheese in it. Use a sharp knife to score the top rind in a diamond pattern, but don't cut too deep. Push thyme sprigs into the scoring slits, here and there.

Bake the Brie in a preheated 180°C oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

Reheat the pears and their syrup. While the baked Brie is still hot, pour the syrup over and spoon on the pear slivers.

Scatter chopped toasted almonds over. Serve with melba toast or savoury biscuits.

Ingredients

(Serves 6-8 as part of a cheeseboard).

1 whole small Brie cheese.

Cooking spray.

100g dried pears.

100ml hanepoot fortified wine.

50g roasted almonds, crushed.

A few thyme sprigs.

Melba toast or savoury biscuits.

What to do in September



Upcoming shows at Evita se Perron in September.



Answers to the quiz.

1. Kite
2. Monkey
3. Owl
4. Ant
5. Elephant
6. Penguin