

A Traveller's Tale

Ocean, Wildlife and White Sand...

by Kirsten Frost

6 July '06



I took a trip up to West Coast National Park yesterday. The weather was lovely and the lagoon was a beautiful bright blue. The bird hides are always a good place to visit and I went to the one closest to the Langebaan Gate first,

close to the sandy banks of the lagoon. The wetland birdlife was great. A flock of flamingoes were comfortably settled close to the hide, feeding in the shallow water and some were relaxing at the waters edge. These fascinating birds kept us entertained through our binoculars for a long while.

From the hide we also saw about 15 African Back Oystercatchers. Although they are endangered, these birds are slowly but surely becoming a common site along the Lagoon as well as along the rocky coast and beach at Tsaarsbank. SANParks is doing a really good job in protecting these sensitive birds against the dangers facing the wildlife.

Kraalbaai...

The flowers are just starting to bloom now, a few small yellow and orange fields are present. Flower season has started early and the beautiful Postberg section opens soon for the public. I'm looking forward to see some bigger antelope and maybe, if I'm lucky, even one of the Predators.



I also saw, for the first time, saw a Parrot-beaked Tortoise as well as the more common species, the Angulate Tortoise. Angulate Tortoises are absent from the roads in the West Coast during some months and cause road blocks during other months when the species are more active along the roads. I kept an eye out for the shy predators of the West Coast National Park: Wild Cat, Bat-Eared Fox, Honey Badgers and of course the elusive cat, the Caracal, but didn't see any this trip.



Birds seen on this outing:

- Greater Flamingoes
- Southern Black Koraan
- Black Oystercatcher
- Greater Gallinule
- Cape Bunting in nest
- Common Stonechat
- Black-Shouldered Kite
- Rock Kestrel (hovering in the sky, like a pied Kingfisher)
- Blackheaded Heron (on the dunes)
- Great Cormorants
- Juv. Klaas Cuckoo
- Pelican (flying over)
- Lots of other common birds also seen...

Mammal seen on this outing:

- :
- Small Grey Mongoose
- 3 steenbok
- 1 cape grysbok

5 August '06



We started our adventure up the West Coast nice and early on Saturday morning, at 06:30. The weather was lovely and cool in the morning and the sun soon rose up over the sandy horizon. As always we had a peaceful ride up the West



Coast Road from Cape Town and soon, we were spotting raptors soaring in the skies and the skittish steenbok scrambling away from the road.

We arrived at the gate with that normal feeling of excitement we get on entering any National Park. There was a slight mist hovering above the ground and the bush was sparkling with dew droplets against the spider webs. After about 10 minutes we were greeted by three playful steenbok next to the road, prancing and springing up and down.

The usual Ostriches were walking and some even running around, such comical birds! I recommend an early start if you are thinking about taking a trip up to the West Coast National Park, I've noticed that during the early mornings, cooler hours of the day the animals are much more active. Postberg gates opened at 9am and it was now 8am so we decided to have a look at Abrahamskraal waterhole (not really a waterhole... they just call it that) the birdlife there was spectacular, with a variety of larger and smaller species of wetland birdlife it would indeed keep the average birder and photographer busy for a long while.



Birds seen on this outing:

African Pied Starling
Black Crake
Cape Reed Warbler
African Sedge Warbler
Yellow Wagtail
Lesser Double collared Sunbird
Yellow Canary
White backed, Speckled and Red-faced Mouse
birds

After that we decided to move on, so we headed for the flowers at Postberg. The park was very green and the abundance of birdlife chirped together as we drove along, it was a real pleasure to drive through such beautiful scenery. Unfortunately the view of the lagoon was hidden as the mist was too thick to see the blue water and the house boats. The mist later disappeared into thin air as we got closer to our destination. We saw a Cape Grysbok and a Common Duiker just before entering Postberg...

We entered Postberg and didn't really know what to expect. The landscape and scenery was very different in comparison to the main area of the West Coast National Park. Postberg is rockier, with huge boulders sticking out of the ground in one section, flat plains sprinkled with beautiful flowers in the other and huge hills along the western roads. Postberg also had very rugged dirt roads with no tarred roads, but this isn't a problem at all for any little car.



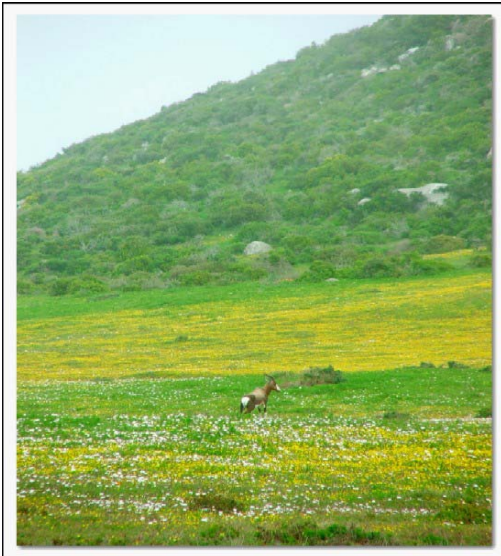
Postberg Landscape



There were signs of wildlife every where, tracks and droppings of Bontebok, Eland and even Porcupine. As soon as the bush turned into flat land we had our first sighting of Bontebok and two Ostriches in the middle of a field of flowers. The mist was still coming and going as we drove to the picnic area which looks out onto the lagoon. The area of Vlaeberg was really dramatic with huge boulders sticking out of the hard gravel ground, unlike West Coast National Parks usual soft sandy ground. As we stopped

to have a look at the flowers we spotted a Cape Girdled lizard relaxing on a small rock which was like a small island among all the flowers.

We then took a different route back to the gates, through fields of flowers and hills in the distance. There were Steenbok, Bontebok, Springbok and a few Ostriches grazing along the road as we drove along, gasping the scenery and the essence of the newly bloomed flowers.



Birds seen on this outing:

Spotted Dikkop
Bokmakierie (calling)
Speckled Mouse bird
Southern Black Koraan
Black Shouldered Kite
Black Harrier
Rock Kestrel
Southern Thick billed Lark

We left beautiful Postberg and were on our way out of the park. As we drove I saw something move, we stopped excitedly to see what it was and through our clenched binoculars there it was- a Caracal!!! The sleek slender cat was walking slowly in our direction (very close- for a caracal, about 200meters); it stopped and crouched right down to the ground. After 2 minutes the Caracal, with its pointed tufted ears, turned around and walked in the opposite direction. I didn't get a picture of the Caracal as it was lying and looking at us because I know these animal sightings only last a few seconds, I enjoyed the moment. I did get a snap shot as it walked away; just before it disappeared into the

thick fynbos. We waited for another 35minutes and were rewarded by seeing it again from a distance.

Animal Sightings



Mammals:
Steenbok
Cape Grysbok
Springbok
Striped Mouse
Bontebok
Caracal
Shrub Hare
Reptiles:
Cape Girdled Lizard
Cape Legless Skink
Only 2 tortoises
