

Enviro- News: Village on Sea

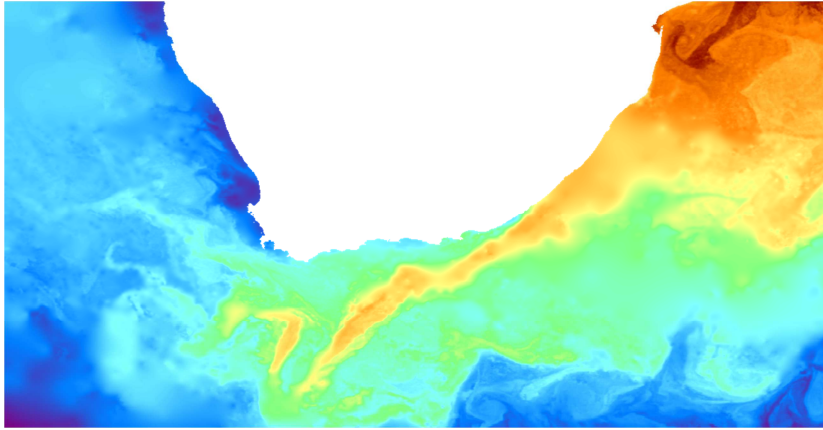
summer 2020

Although 21 December is geologically the middle of summer, followed by a progressive decrease in day-length, the warmest months are still to come. Several noteworthy environmental changes can be reported since the spring Environmental News. Most notable has been the departure of our two prominent whale species: the Humpback and the Southern Right.. This has been a long and intense season, with first sightings reported on 30 March, and last recorded on 24 November. We had a feast in viewing the intense displays of many adults and their calves.

Despite having access to data that shows how many South African endemic linefish species have been depleted, it has been a remarkable paradox to see how plentiful many of these species have been over the past few months. For example, there have been large shoals of mussel cracker and excellent catches of garrick and kob. Even more perplexing, these species would have depended on our vulnerable estuaries during their juvenile phase, but somehow they survived to grow to sizeable specimens.

Although it is mostly out of sight, the coastline of our Estate borders on the Agulhas Bank, a large relatively shallow plateau that stretches up to 300km offshore. This biodiversity-rich area is defined by largely by the Agulhas Current where it flows predominantly along its outer edge, before it splits into smaller currents. One of these retroflects and turns eastward, thereby directing the eggs and larvae spawned on the Agulhas Bank to the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Another branch often flow around the Cape to join the Benguela system, which means that West Indian Ocean fishes and turtles end up deep into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Bank is where many of our key species spawn, so maintaining its overall health important. In particular, anchovies, sardines and related species breed here. Fluctuations in their abundance can cause negative cascade effects in the ecosystem. These past few months have seen some of the enormous concentrations of anchovy and similar species . They can be seen as dark patches , best seen during clear days where cloudless skies do not cast confusing shadows on the water. Often such shoals can be seen accompanied by frenzied feeding common dolphins.



The Agulhas Current in mid-December 2020, showing water ranging in temperature from 14° to 19°C.



Feeding dolphins in hot pursuit of shoaling anchovies.

The previously reported environmental impact assessments relating to the creating of a fish processing plant in Mossel Bay have made some progress. The fish meal plant has been approved, although some concerns still remain. The preliminary assessment of the offshore oil exploration report has been accepted so that a full impact assessment will now take place.

The mongoose and MacGyver (a personal story)

For several years, we have enjoyed the antics of a family of mongooses, which had taken up residence in our roof. Warmly tucked away amongst the soft pink insulation they were very content. But their midnight games, pummelling on our bedroom ceiling and the accumulating scats left us little alternative to get them to move. Easier said than done. These are highly intelligent animals and they would not give up. So we decided to keep them awake with music – at all hours. However, they seemed to like that – even our loud shoes failed to dislodge, them.. Next, we had a great idea- we bought a few kilos of moth balls and scattered those on the ceilings. But the mongooses simply moved deeper into the roof.

As there is only one route onto the roof – along the top of an external wall, we considered closing this access. We placed a huge, bright yellow inflatable kids ‘jumping’ ball. This worked like a dream.

The 'daddy' mongoose could not gain grip on the ball and we watched with amusement as he tried to negotiate over the ball – with no success. We had won or had we? For, within days with the ball slightly deflated he circumvented the barrier. Wishing our mongooses no harm we decided on an electric approach. With the help of Stafix we erected a copper tube gate-like structure, with electric fencing wires. This was a final solution because 'once shocked twice shy'. And yet the mongoose appeared in the roof again!

We found that when the gate is armed, a green light flashes. We may be crediting this species with too much intellect but it appears that when the green light is off, the coast is clear!

In any event, his young family was safely carried in his jaws in search of a new address.



Mongoose look of despair at losing his 'house'

A few new books have recently been published by Struik Nature, of potential interest to VoS residents

- The 5th version of the *Sasol Guide: Birds of Southern Africa*, has been extensively revised by the top five ornithologists in RSA. This handsome book has much more information than earlier versions and is recommended for all bird lovers.
- A new App has been launched by the Oceanographic Research Institute to assist anglers with the identification of South African fish species. . Beautifully illustrated with much updated information this smartphone app is sure to be popular with anglers.[Istore: *Marine Fish Guide for Southern Africa*] All proceeds go directly to fish research.
- For the family that enjoys beach outings' *Beachcombing in South Africa* is a popular and authoritative book to identify the curious animals that wash up or live on the sea shore. [Struik Nature by Rudy van der Elst]

Rudy van der Elst