

A buffalo is born – a first in 200 years

The first buffalo calf in approximately 200 years has been born on the Agulhas Plain. The calf forms part of a herd of buffalo reintroduced into the area by the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area (SMA) venture. Records show buffalo were last seen on the Agulhas Plain in the late 1700s.

According to Dirk Human, Chairman of the Nuwejaars Wetland SMA, the buffalo calf signifies the first step in turning back the clock on the Agulhas Plain. “Aside from buffalo, we’ve also reintroduced hippo, last seen here some 150 years ago. We’re slowly moving towards bringing back the natural systems as they existed in previous centuries.” The buffalo calf will be given an appropriate indigenous Khoisan name still to be decided.

The Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area includes 25 landowners in the Overberg district who are collectively managing their land for conservation, while promoting sustainable agriculture. Members have had title deed restrictions signed against their properties to ensure conservation principles are followed. The SMA has applied for Protected Environment (PE) status, and will become the first national PE if granted.

Environmental planner at Dennis Moss Partnerships, SW van der Merwe, says the SMA aims to create self-sustaining economic, social and environmental systems on the land. He says, “The Nuwejaars Wetland SMA is the only dedicated integrated land management strategy of its kind existing in the world.” Its principles were adopted in the Madrid Action Plan at UNESCO’s World Congress on Biosphere Reserves in 2008.

The venture encompasses an area that is home to more than 100 endangered fynbos species, many of these listed on the red list as critically endangered. Threatened Renosterveld is also found here, along with highly irreplaceable wetlands.

The contribution made by the Nuwejaars Wetland SMA venture to conservation on agricultural land was recently recognised by the Department of Agriculture. At Agri Mega Week held earlier this month in Bredasdorp, members of the SMA signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Western Cape, Gerrit van Rensburg. The deal will see the SMA and the Department of Agriculture working closely to promote sustainable biodiversity conservation and rural development in the area.

Human says, “This alliance with the Department is a new way to approach our joint challenges together, giving government the opportunity to contribute to conserving our biodiversity and cultural heritage on private land. Without the support of the Department, and

all our other partners, the SMA would not have achieved what it already has. And certainly wouldn't be able to boast a new buffalo calf."

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