

Buffalo birth turns clock back 200 years

Environment Writer

A BUFFALO calf has been born on the Agulhas Plain for the first time in over 200 years.

The little female calf was born at the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area in the Overberg district, and represents the first step to reintroducing a breeding herd back on the plains where buffalo once roamed free.

Dirk Human, chairman of the special management area, said yesterday as far as they could establish, the last buffalo were seen on the Agulhas Plain in the late 1700s. Most of the animals were shot out by settlers.

"We're still trying to confirm that date, but that's what we believe so far.

"For the time being, she will be kept in the buffalo boma with the rest of the herd, because sheep are farmed in this region and sheep carry *snotsiekte*. That is lethal for buffalo.

"But eventually we intend to introduce buffalo to specific areas," Human said.

The birth of the buffalo calf was the first step in "turning back the clock" on the Agulhas Plain.

In April last year, a herd of 15 disease-free buffalo were bought for the area.



IN THE BUFF: This little calf doesn't know it, but it is the first buffalo to be born on the Agulhas Plain in over 200 years after settlers wiped out all the existing herds.

Picture: DIRK HUMAN

"This is the first offspring of that herd. We also brought in five hippo last year, which were last seen in this region 150 years ago. There is a record that the last hippo were seen here in the 1850s. We're slowly moving towards bringing back the natural systems as they existed in previous centuries," Human said.

The buffalo calf would be given "an appropriate indigenous Khoisan name".

The Nuwejaars project is the first of its kind in South Africa. It includes 25 landowners who are farming in such a manner that they are also promoting conservation.

Their purpose is to create a self-sustaining economic, social and environmental system on the land.

The landowners have title deed restrictions signed against their properties to ensure that conservation principles are followed.