



**FRANSMANSHOEK**  
BEWAREA CONSERVANCY

## **November 2014 MONTHLY REPORT**

### **Compliance Management**

Throughout November a total of 14 recreational fishing and bait collecting permits were checked by the rangers. Everyone inspected was in possession of a valid permit.

### **Cape Cobras in Vleesbaai**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November Ruan and Petro responded to a snake callout by Mr. Koos du Preez's for a residence in Hoekbaai, Vleesbaai. Mr. du Preez first speculated that the snake might be a Skaapsteker (*Psammophylax spp.*) but upon arrival Ruan identified the snake as a Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) of an estimated 1.5 meters in length.

The student rangers were very excited about the call out as it was their first succesful Cape Cobra capture and release for the year. Many call-outs have been made for Cobra's in the area so far this year but by the time the rangers had arrived the Cobra had already disappeared. This Cobra was safely captured by Ruan and boxed by Petro where after it was released far from the resort town in a safe environment.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November the student rangers received a second call out to Vleesbaai for the sighting of another Cape Cobra at a different residence. The same procedure followed and the snake was safely placed in the box and released far away. The second cobra was much larger in size than the previous cobra and slightly more alert and aggressive, however the retrieval still went smooth.



**A Cape Cobra shortly before being released, expanding its broad impressive hood.**



**The same Cape Cobra slithering away into the vegetation.**

### **Mole snake in Visbaai**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> on November while conducting her Roving Creel survey, student ranger Petro noticed something from afar lying on the sand in the bay of Visbaai. What first appeared to be a washed out piece of wood turned out to be a mole snake (*Pseudaspis cana*).

Various species of snake have been sighted on the beach in the past however it is still a rather unusual sighting. What's more unusual is that Petro surveyed the same area the following day only to find the snake again in the same place.

Snakes will venture out onto the beach, especially in areas that have large sections of veldt adjacent the coast, such as Visbaai. This sighting interestingly happened only days after the Cape Cobra had been spotted on the beach at Hout Bay. The Burger Newspaper heard about the story after Petro had put the photos on Facebook and contacted her the following week to run a short story on it in their paper.



**The mole snake spotted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day.**

## **Oyster Harvesters**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November tensions ran high once again regarding the commercial harvesting of oysters. This time Hein Eksteen and a team of harvesters had used the entrance of property 257/39 to access the coast. This access allows them to park out of site which sounded the alarm bells for the rangers.

Roland enquired as to where the Mossel Bay Fisheries Officers were, luckily to his advantage they were at Fransmanshoek Point and met the rangers to discuss the situation at hand. It turned out that a number of annual permits had still not been issued to existing right holders, as they had failed to produce the necessary paperwork and requirements needed for the renewal of their permit. The rangers and Fishery officers suspected that some of the harvesters in question were included in the above mentioned group and went to inspect who was with Hein.

The group of harvesters were already on their way back from the ocean and had already shuffled koevoets and bags to those who had permits with the illegal harvesters posing as carriers. Back at the vehicles, the matter was attempted to be cleared out, however the usual stories from the harvesters ensued. Thisiwe Mfono and Shamley Titus (both from Dept of Fisheries) first requested clarification as to who had harvested what and who owned each koevoet. At this point in the situation nothing can be done to them unless the harvesters admit to harvesting illegally. The harvesters are clever enough to know this by now and so even though 3 out of the 5 harvesters didn't have a valid permit (even though they are right holders) nothing could be done to them without a confession.

At this point the tensions started to build and the situation was becoming confrontational with the harvesters blaming the Dept of Fisheries for not processing their request in time. Roland and Shamley stepped in to clarify the situation as by this point no one was making any sense. Shamley requested honesty from the harvesters as everyone knows they are lying and they are only making the situation difficult for everyone including themselves. Roland further clarified that the incompetence lay mostly with the right holders as they were too lazy to get all the paperwork and other criteria sorted in order to receive their annual permit. Shamley has recently just started at Mossel bay Dept of Fisheries but has many years of compliance experience from Goukamma and Knysna and knows the law well. Shamley warned the harvesters that they should heed this incident as a warning and that he is going to come down hard on them should they take these chances again.

Nonetheless, everyone is reminded that for the most part the harvesters are legal. The commercial permits they possess allow them to harvest as many oysters as they can, being limited by the manpower and diving gear they are allowed to use. It is hard work harvesting oysters and they have to carry heavy bags for long distances and up steep hills. Still there are the ones that take chances and hopefully Shamleys experience in law enforcement can help bring the harvesters to be more compliant with the law.

## **Farewell to 2014 Student Rangers**

As always we bid farewell to our student rangers on the 30<sup>th</sup> November as they finish their contract at Fransmanshoek Conservancy. Both Petro and Ruan thoroughly enjoyed their time at the Conservancy and had some exciting moments and memories to take with them. The Conservancy wishes them best of luck with the rest of their studies ahead.

## **Living More Eco-Friendly within the Conservancy**

To live in an environment where the natural world is still in relatively good health is a privilege not many people have. But some people's fascination with the fauna representation in their area can motivate them (sometimes understandably) to tend to try and attract as many animal species as possible to where they live. Regular feeding of various wild animal species can cause a variety of negative behaviors and knock on effects. Below we offer a few guidelines around the feeding of wild populations of animals...

- **Sun and Sugarbird Feeders** – The ethics of sugar-water often mixed with food colouring being fed to Sunbirds and Sugarbirds has long been debated.

People love seeing birds so close to their living space and are not going to be easily discouraged by the potential negative effects they may be having. Nonetheless, the potential to foster dependency, alter natural distribution, density and migration patterns, interfere with ecological processes, indirectly cause malnutrition, facilitate the spread of disease and increasing the risk of death from cats and hitting windows can be greatly increased by artificially feeding wildlife.

We would like you to bear this in mind the next time you plan to add another sunbird feeder. More so, if you are going to feed them, be sure to use the right mixture of unrefined sugar and water. Steer clear of food colouring (which can be toxic) and other additives such as Marmite. Rather make the feeder itself the necessary colour to attract the birds instead of using a food colouring. A number of studies suggest that sugar water is not harmful to Sunbirds and Sugarbirds as such, if the correct ratio is used. The sugar mixture merely lacks in some of the necessary trace elements they would otherwise obtain from the nectar of flowers. It is very important not to use honey, as diluted honey water has been shown to create an environment for harmful bacteria which can cause ill effects in the birds feeding on it. So remember, no food colouring, honey or any other additive and clean the feeder regularly, dirty feeders are also a breeding ground for harmful bacteria.

- **Seed Feeders** - While Sugarbird feeders only attract a number of nectar feeding birds, seed feeders can attract rodents which can quickly lead to a number of knock on problems.

Rodents can quickly become a pest with the abundance of food around a household, which in turn could prompt homeowners to use poisons to try and control the population or kill individuals that have started living in their house. The use of poisons can cause secondary poisoning in the predators of rodents such as owls and other raptors. One can see how the initial good

intention of seeing more birds from your window can quickly become detrimental to your natural surroundings.

Rodents will also attract snakes which are more often than not killed by people. So unless you are comfortable with rodents living in your house and snakes in your immediate vicinity, think twice about putting out unnatural quantities of seed.

- **Meat and Fruit for Small Mammals** – Many of the same principles as seed feeders apply to this form of feeding wild animals. While our area luckily doesn't have Vervet Monkeys or Baboons, there are a number of other animals that could quickly become unwanted visitors rather than 'nice to look at'. What's more, Vervet Monkeys have been spotted a number of times in and around the Conservancy yet luckily none have managed to establish within the area. The nearest populations being the deep ravines behind Voelvlei. Nevertheless, the threat of them establishing is possible and the lure of meat and fruit being placed out in animal feeders only strengthens these chances.

Other animals such as Gennet Cats, both small and large Grey Mongoose, Otters, Feral Cats and Bushpigs can quickly become habituated to people around feeding stations and could easily become more of a pest. Gennets and Mongoose will readily enter houses through open windows to clear up scraps left around.

So, think a bit more carefully before putting large quantities of kitchen food, seeds or bird feeders up as you might end up having a negative impact rather than a positive one. Artificial water points are a subtle way to lure wild animals to within your vicinity and attract a complete range of species without any of the negative effects mentioned.

### **Monthly Species Profile**

The Mole snake is a relatively common visitor to the Conservancy area. They are however much more prevalent on the western side of the Gouritz river where the soil is much more sandy and where the Dune Mole-Rat population is through the roof.

**Common name:**  
Mole snake, Molslang  
**Scientific name:**  
*Pseudaspis cana*  
Class: Reptilia  
Order: Serpentes  
Family: Colubridae



**Description:**

A mole snake can be described as a large thick, solid snake with a slightly hooked nose. Adults can exceed 2m in the Western Cape. The body scales are smooth (but sometimes keeled in black snakes from the Western Cape), in 25-31 rows. Each nostril is pierced between two nasals. The anal shield is divided. The eyes have round pupils. Coloration is variable. The young are blotched, the body being light red-brown with four rows of dark pale-edged spots (the centre pair may fuse to form a zigzag pattern). The adults are plain (the juvenile pattern is sometimes retained), usually light to red-brown, but occasionally olive, grey, dark brown or black which is common in the Western Cape. Males are thicker and have longer tails than the females.

**Habitat:**

Found in sandy shrubland, highveld grassland as well as mountainous and desert regions. Their range is throughout Southern Africa (and on Robben Island) as well as up north to Angola and Kenya.

**Life History:**

Mole snakes are extremely useful in helping to control rodent populations, but are unfortunately often mistaken for Cobras and killed by people. They are harmless to people, being constrictors that live underground in abandoned animal burrows and feed on moles, rodents and other small mammals. Juveniles also eat lizards. Some eat eggs, which they swallow whole. They are aggressive when approached, and often bite and twist leaving deep gasps that may require stitches. They mate in late spring (October), and 25 – 40 (up to 95) young are born during March – April, each measuring 200 to 310mm at birth.

**Reference:**

Branch, B., 1998. *Field guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.

Marais, J., 2004. *A complete guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town

**Roland Scholtz**

**Ruan Matthee**

**Petro Rossouw**

**FRANSMANSHOEK CONSERVANCY**

**082 084 2791**

**ranger@fransmanshoek.co.za**