



SEPTEMBER 2026

Dear BBC members

Looking back over the past few weeks...

Over the past few weeks, the BBC and its members have been actively engaged in several conservation-related issues:

- Speeding on the R44 and engaging with the Standing Committee for Mobility of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament.
- Following up with the Overstrand Municipality on the wildlife signage, initiated by the BBRA, with design collaboration by the BBC.
- Engaging with the Overstrand Municipality about the shooting of Thunder in a residential area.
- Stony Point penguin colony: night patrols, supporting a WAPSA letter regarding the sardine die-off, engaging with CapeNature, on volunteers assisting during the busy season.
- The International Coastal Clean-up.



Looking ahead to the coming weeks...

There are issues to be aware of:

- The Great Southern Bioblitz is on 27-30 November.
- "Fire Season," and the need to be vigilant and prepared.
- The peak holiday season is appearing on the horizon, when the village fills with homeowners, renters, and tourists – and the resulting impact on the village.
- The nomination process for the Ward 10 Ward Committee starts on 23 October.



More about these in our next newsletter.

Best wishes from the BBC Team.

Carol, Ann, Barbara, Nina, Patrick, Pete, Jan and Tony

Photos: Ella Fourie

Thanks to everyone who contributed articles.

Compiled by Carol Clark and proofread by Patrick Boltler.

BBC 4th SATURDAY

September is "International Coastal Clean-up" (ICC) month!

The BBC shifts its usual "4thSaturday" event to the third Saturday of September to participate in the ICC.

This year, we had a double event. To highlight the impact of pollution and destructive human activities on oceans, we screened Sir David Attenborough's OCEAN on Friday 18 September, the evening before the clean-up.

OCEAN by Sir David Attenborough

I saw OCEAN for the first time at the BBC event.

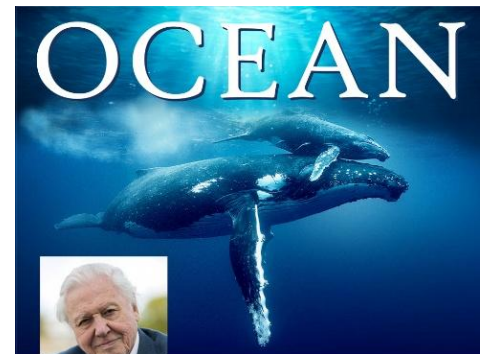
What a phenomenal achievement by Sir David Attenborough to complete this project when he was nearly 100 years old!

For those who don't snorkel or scuba dive, films like this bring the hidden ocean world to life - exquisite, colourful, and incredibly diverse. Left untouched, these marine ecosystems thrive

But man destroys things.

For me, one of the most shocking scenes was the industrial bottom trawlers destroying the seabed. Boats drag heavy chains or a beam along the seabed, scour the floor, and force everything in the path into the net behind them. They often look for just one species, and over three-quarters of their catch may be thrown away. Vibrant, colourful diversity and ecosystems end as shattered bits of nothingness in a grey swirl of destruction.

View the scene at the link below.



WITH DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

The BBC is excited to screen this amazing film!

When: Friday 18th September
Venue: Crassula Hall, Betty's Bay
Time: 6:30 p.m.

No charge; donations to support the BBC are welcomed

ALL WELCOME
Please RSVP to:-
bettysbayconservancy@gmail.com
or WhatsApp 079 7530166



The documentary "Ocean with David Attenborough" features **dramatic footage of bottom trawling**, showcasing the destruction caused by this method of fishing. The film reveals the **iron chains**

bulldozing across the seabed, leaving trails of devastation that are visible from space. The footage highlights the **wasteful nature of trawling**, where trawlers often discard almost everything they catch, including non-target species. Attenborough remarks, "it's hard to imagine a more wasteful way to catch fish," emphasising the need for stronger ocean protection to combat the ongoing destruction caused by dredging and trawling.

Click below to view the scene

[Never-before-seen footage of bottom trawling released from Ocean ...](#)

Another chilling scene involves huge krill factory ships in Antarctica, hauling and processing tons of krill daily, near penguin colonies that rely on krill for food. How long before these penguins, and other marine creatures who feed on krill, are left with a radically diminished food supply and the resulting impacts? An example of the effects of overfishing and diminished food sources for penguins lies “close to home. At Stony Point and other African Penguin colonies, commercial fishing has severely impacted the population.

It seems that man, with a short-sighted focus on profiting from the ocean, causes so much devastation, with no thought of the long-term impact.

After highlighting examples of destruction in the film, there are also positive examples of where protection has been put in place, and marine ecosystems have the opportunity and capacity to restore.

I think the destructive scenes stay in one’s mind – reflecting how removed people can be from the impacts of their actions when money is at stake; they focus on immediate gain, don’t care about the effects, or have no interest in long-term impact. That obviously applies to so many scenarios in terrestrial ecosystems too.

Thanks to:

- Leon du Toit and Patrick Boltler for sponsoring the hire of Crassula Hall for the screening.
- Pete Oxford and Mike Markavina for their input and discussion after the film, and for highlighting the need to protect the Betty’s Bay Marine Protected Area (MPA).



Carol Clark

INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEAN-UP (ICC)

Sunny Seas	Abalone, Luckhoff, Albertyn, Dolphin, Cove	Derrienne Maes (coast and verges)	079 2308237
Jacks Bay	West end of Marine Drive	Viv von der Heyden	084 6852641
Main Beach	Main Beach car park	Sandy Immelman	082 4840983
Stony Point	Car park	Patrick Bottler	082 3989371
		Carol Clark	079 7301666
Draadbaai	Car park	Zelda Botma	082 9906258
Silversands	Car park	Barbara Jenman	082 9984109

BETTY'S BAY CONSERVANCY

Everyone enjoyed a great day at the big ICC Betty's Bay Cleanup. The wind calmed down, and the weather was kind to the volunteers, including several enthusiastic learners from four local schools.

It was a pleasant surprise to see less rubbish on our beaches.

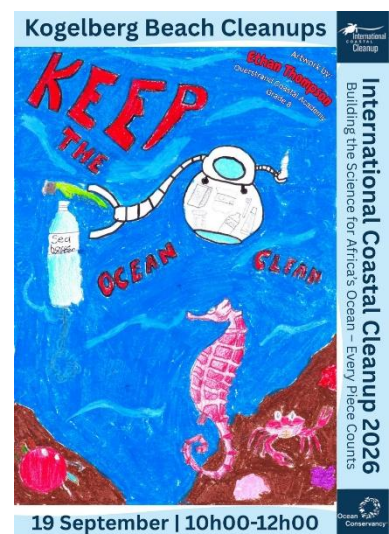


Betty's Bay had seven shoreline sites to clean up.

In *Sunny Seas*, which has a rocky shore, we cleaned the roads and drainage ditches, boosting the total number of FULL bags to 61. We collected the usual bottle tops, as well as hundreds of plastic bits and degrading plastic bags. The balls of fishing line and builders' rubble are always a great concern. Some of the most unusual things collected were a long aluminium fascia board, a hearing aid, an old oystercatcher signboard, a panga and a fishing knife.



There were 16 volunteers at *Stony Point*, including the friendly and supportive staff from CapeNature. We collected five bags of trash; of note were a faded road cone, a broken plastic chair, and old signage. We had the cutest, spunky, and most enthusiastic learner helping us; Candice. Some of her fellow learners, her lovely parents, and brother joined her. He won the artwork competition for the ICC, and his picture was used as the poster for the 2026 clean-up. Thanks to all who helped and to Robert for his great organisation.



Thanks to the volunteers who helped to clean at *Draad Baai*: Zelda, Mercia, Ann and Graham.

The five volunteers at *Jock's Bay* found little to pick up along the coastline apart from a fair amount of fishing line, a few condom packets, plastic bottles, snack packets, and bits and pieces that filled less than half a bag. We then filled three bags with rubbish found on both sides of Clarence Drive, from Coffee on Clarence to Cliff Road. Many thanks to Wendy and Gordon, Andrea and Tony, for their enthusiasm, cheerful labouring and company!



Thanks to Sandy for coordinating at *Main Beach*. They found the beach in pristine condition with little to pick up.

Big thanks to Robert Kyser of Pringle Bay for including us in helping with collation of data for the OCEAN CONSERVANCY and others who fight the good cause at international treaties to minimise plastic manufacturing in the world.

The most unusual item collected was a hearing aid! Pity the poor ex-owner - they say sometimes the wind can blow them off!

Thanks to everyone who helped at the International Coastal Cleanup and to Robert for all his time and effort in another successful ICC.

Compiled by Barbara Jenman. Photos and feedback from the coordinators

BBC UPDATES

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS FOR 2026/27

About 50% of our members have renewed their fees for the new financial year.

If you joined the BBC during or before 2026 we would value your continued support and payment of fees. BBC members who joined during 2026 are only due to renew their fees after the 2027 AGM.

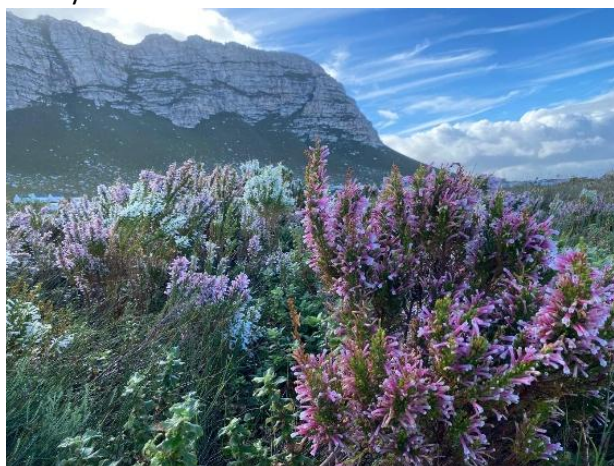
Fees are R130 for full members – those who would like to donate more to support the work of the BBC are welcome.

Associate members pay R65.

BBC Bank Details:

Betty's Bay Conservancy
Nedbank
Account 1211375850
Branch 183509 or 198765 (universal)

Photo: Neil van der Watt



WARD 10 WARD COMMITTEE

The BBC has submitted an Expression of Interest to Overstrand Municipality for the Ward 10 Ward Committee. The next step is the formal Nomination Process. The Ward Committee elections take place in February 2027.

At the last elections, BBC was a relatively new organisation and just missed a place on the Ward Committee. In the 2027 elections, BBC must secure a place to be a voice for conservation issues in Betty's Bay.



WARD COMMITTEE ELECTIONS 2027

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST OPEN ON
25 SEPTEMBER 2026



Overstrand Municipality is preparing for the upcoming Ward Committee Elections in February 2027 and encourages residents, organisations, **sectors** and **geographical blocks** to start thinking about who they would like to see representing their ward and community interests.



IMPORTANT

The nominator, nominee and seconder must all be registered IEC voters in the ward concerned (Political parties are not eligible.)

WARD COMMITTEE MEMBERS MUST REPRESENT:



An Organisation



A Sector



A Geographical Block

NOTE: Organisations and sectors must have been operational within the particular ward for **at least six months**, and have a valid constitution.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?



Organisations

Youth groups, women's groups, religious organisations, ratepayers' associations and homeowners' associations.



Sectors

Groups representing broad community interests such as sport, recreation, health and welfare.



Geographical Block(s)

Neighbourhoods, villages and other defined areas within a ward.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE:

- ✓ Constitution or governing document
- ✓ Organisation details and contact information
- ✓ Date of establishment
- ✓ Membership information

NOTE: The Municipality Community Liaison Team is available to help.

IMPORTANT DATES



25 SEPTEMBER 2026

Expressions of Interest process opens, and closes 12 October 2026.



From 23 OCTOBER 2026

Formal Nomination Process opens, and closes 16 November 2026.



FEBRUARY 2027

Ward Committee Elections.

THE QUALIFYING CRITERIA FOR REGISTRATION IS AS FOLLOW:

- 1 Be a registered voter and whose name appears on the IEC voters' roll for the particular ward.
- 2 Organisations/sectors wishing to participate in the ward committee elections must have been operational within the particular ward for at least six (6) months and must have a formally adopted constitution.
- 3 Not be a member of the Overstrand Municipal Council.
- 4 Not be permanently or contractually employed by the Overstrand Municipality or Overberg District Municipality.
- 5 Not be a Community Development Worker.
- 6 Not have been indebted with the Municipality for a period longer than three (3) calendar months, with the exception that proof can be provided that the necessary arrangements have been made to settle the debt and continue to remain in good standing for the duration of the term of office.
- 7 Not have been convicted of an offence and sentenced for a period of more than twelve (12) months.
- 8 Close family members (husband, wife, child, parent) may not serve on the same ward committee.



Ward Committee Rules can be downloaded from the municipal website www.overstrand.gov.za → About Us → Wards. Expressions of Interest and formal nomination forms can be submitted either in person or electronically.

CONTACT YOUR COMMUNITY LIAISON MANAGER FOR ENQUIRIES AND SUBMISSIONS

HERMANUS (Wards 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 & 13)
Ntombi Mtholo
028 313 8112
nmtholo@overstrand.gov.za
1 Magnolia Street, Hermanus

GANSBAAI/STANFORD (Wards 1, 2, 11 & 14)
Marzaan Middleton
028 384 8365
mmiddleton@overstrand.gov.za
Main Road, Gansbaai

KLEINMOND (Wards 9, 10 & 15)
Angelo Ford
028 271 8400
aford@overstrand.gov.za
33 5th Avenue, Kleinmond

STONY POINT NATURE RESERVE

FEEDBACK FROM THE BBC SURVEY OF RESIDENTS' CONCERNS AND IDEAS ON THE PROPOSED PREDATOR-DETERRENT FENCE AT STONY POINT



In August, after the community information session hosted by CapeNature, the BBC posted a survey allowing residents to share their concerns and ideas about the proposed predator-deterrent fence. The BBC summarised this information and sent the report to CapeNature.

CapeNature addressed many of these in the subsequent community sessions they hosted at the Harold Porter Garden. View the report at this link:

<https://bettysbayconservancy.co.za/summary-of-the-responses-from-the-bbc-residents-survey-on-the-fence-at-stony-point/>

THE SARDINE DIE-OFF AND ITS IMPACT ON THE AFRICAN PENGUIN

THE ROLLERCOASTER OF FOOD AVAILABILITY FOR THE AFRICAN PENGUIN

Last year: The fishing closures

This year: The sardine die-off

On 18 March 2025, the Pretoria High Court made an 'order of court' into a negotiated settlement, reviewing and setting aside the Minister's decision announced on 4 August 2023.

BirdLife South Africa and SANCCOB, represented by the Biodiversity Law Centre, negotiated the settlement with commercial fishing representatives, and the State subsequently endorsed it. The order established year-round restrictions around six key breeding colonies for ten years, subject to scientific review after six years. Those colonies are Dassen Island, Robben Island, Stony Point, Dyer Island, St Croix Island and Bird Island.



And then, the mass sardine die-off.

A recent Daily Maverick article by Dr Adam Cruise highlighted the issues well.

Silent crisis -starving penguins, dying sardines and a government gambling with species extinction
<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-10-11-penguins/>

Organisations are calling for a moratorium on sardine fishing until more information is obtained on the status of the sardines. BBC supported a letter by the Wildlife Animal Protection Forum South Africa (WAPSA) to the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, David Maynier. It calls for him to implement an immediate moratorium on all pelagic species fishing within South African marine waters for a minimum of six months.

Read the letter at <https://wapfsa.org/immed-moratorium-on-fishing-for.../>

Carol Clark

PERSPECTIVES ON BIOSPHERE LIVING

LIVING WITH NATURE: UNDERSTANDING UNESCO BIOSPHERE RESERVES

Across the world, humanity faces a growing challenge: how do we protect our natural environment while allowing communities to develop, prosper, and improve their quality of life? For decades, conservation and development were often regarded as opposing interests. UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve Programme was established to demonstrate that the two can, and indeed must, coexist.

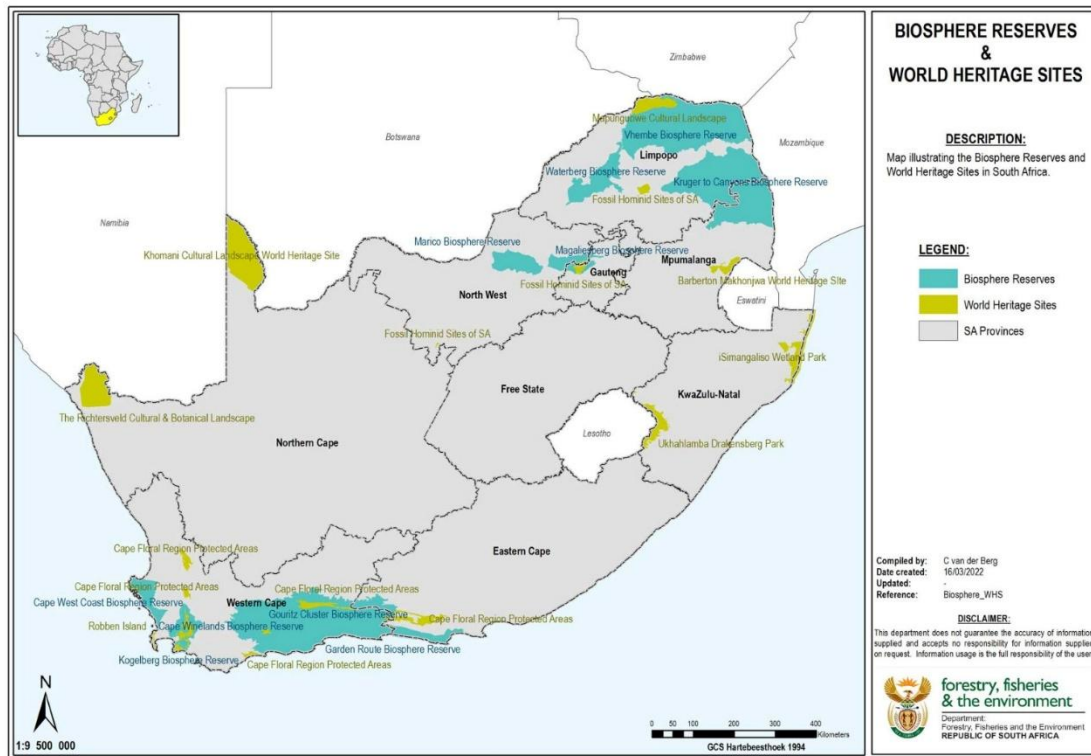
In 1971, UNESCO launched its **Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme**, an international scientific initiative aimed at improving the relationship between people and their natural environment. The programme recognises that human beings are not separate from nature, but form an integral part of the ecosystems upon which all life depends.



A biosphere reserve is therefore much more than a traditional nature reserve. It is an internationally recognised area where biodiversity conservation, sustainable economic development, scientific research and community participation are brought together within a common framework. Today, UNESCO's global network includes more than 700 biosphere reserves across more than 140 countries, each contributing to a worldwide effort to develop practical models for sustainable living.

The concept rests on three fundamental principles: **conservation, sustainable development, and education and research**. Conservation seeks to protect ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity. Sustainable development encourages responsible economic activities that benefit local communities without destroying the natural resources upon which they depend. Research, education and monitoring provide the scientific knowledge needed to understand environmental change and guide responsible decision-making.

To achieve these objectives, biosphere reserves generally comprise three interconnected zones. The **core areas** contain legally protected ecosystems of particular conservation importance. Surrounding these are **buffer zones**, where compatible activities such as environmental education, research and ecotourism may take place. Beyond these lie the **transition areas**, where people live, work, farm and conduct business while pursuing environmentally responsible development. Importantly, UNESCO recognition does not transfer ownership or governmental authority to UNESCO. Biosphere reserves remain subject to national legislation and local governance. Their success depends largely on cooperation between government, scientists, conservation organisations, landowners, businesses and local communities.



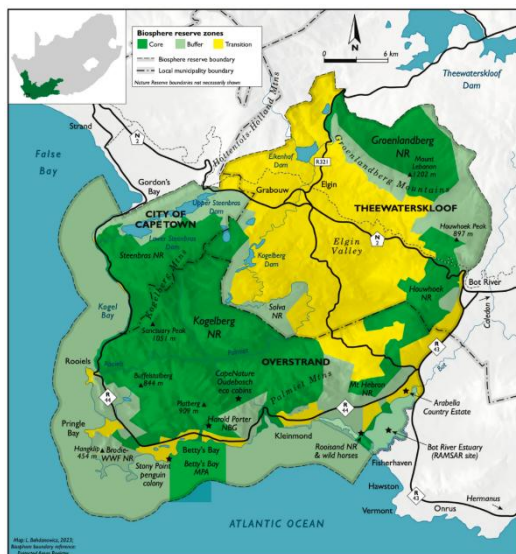
In 1998, South Africa entered this international network when the **Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve** became the country's first UNESCO-designated biosphere reserve. Situated in the Western Cape, this remarkable landscape represents one of the world's most extraordinary concentrations of plant biodiversity. Yet its international recognition carries a responsibility extending far beyond protecting rare plants. It challenges everyone living and working within its boundaries to consider how conservation, development and community wellbeing can become mutually reinforcing objectives. Ultimately, a biosphere reserve is not simply a place on a map. It is a commitment to a different relationship between people and nature, one in which protecting our natural heritage becomes an investment in the future of our communities and generations still to come.

Johan West



About the author: Johan West is a former long-standing director of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve Company (KBRC), having served as its Chairman from 2012 to 2017. He was also chairman of the Western Cape Biosphere Reserve Forum for two years and served on the Board of the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve. He currently serves on the Finance Committee of the South Africa's National Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Committee and is a member of the AfriMAB Panel of Experts.

BETTY'S BAY IS IN THE HEART OF A BIOSPHERE – AN INDISPUTABLE FACT



Something I'm hearing more and more, and I don't know if I'm the only one, is that Betty's Bay is not part of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, and that the biosphere applies only to the mountain and the Kogelberg Nature Reserve. I mean, really, what next? There seems to be some confusion between the Nature Reserve and the Biosphere Reserve. One is a protected mountain; the other is a UNESCO-designated living landscape, and Betty's Bay forms part of this biosphere.

The claim that Betty's does not form part of the biosphere is factually incorrect and carries serious consequences. Any **concerned resident** living here knows exactly why this narrative tends to surface in development-aligned discussions. It undermines decades of conservation work, weakens environmental protections, and opens the door to development that is fundamentally incompatible with the ecological character of this place. It often overlooks the ecological realities of the very wildlife that makes Betty's such a wonderful place.



One can almost admire the creativity. After all, it takes a certain imaginative flair to stand in a coastal town surrounded by fynbos, wetlands, lakes, dunes, penguins, porcupines, otters, grysbok, and baboons and declare, with a straight face, that we are not in a biosphere. It's like insisting that Table Mountain is not in Cape Town.

Globally, there are 784 UNESCO biospheres across 142 countries, forming the World Network of Biospheres — and Betty's Bay is one of them. Approximately 300 million people — about 4% of the world's population — live in biosphere reserves. It can be done. In Costa Rica's Savegre Biosphere Reserve, entire towns and farming communities live alongside jaguars and cloud forests. On Spain's island of Menorca, 95,000 residents inhabit a biosphere that balances tourism and conservation. In Germany's Rhön Biosphere Reserve, villages and farms operate within protected landscapes. Jeju Island in South Korea, home to more than 600,000 people, is also a biosphere reserve. Living in a

biosphere is not unusual — it is a globally recognised model of sustainable living, and Betty's Bay is part of that model.

Today, as development pressures mount and tourism campaigns intensify, this divisive narrative has begun to circulate.

If you really want to see **biosphere denialism** in action, simply mention — at any social gathering of people you don't know very well — that:

- baboons should be managed humanely
- porcupines, tortoises and moles are welcome garden guests
- scorpions, spiders and snakes are not the apocalypse
- shoreline fishing in Betty's Bay should be paused so stocks can recover
- the speed limit on Clarence Drive should be reduced to 60 km/h
- and (heaven forbid) that Betty's Bay is part of a biosphere



You don't need to be adept at reading a room to see it shift. Watch the body language.

It's weird how a simple geographical detail, offered in kindness, can be misinterpreted as something provocative.

Let me state this loud and clear: **Betty's Bay is part of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve.**

The facts are clear and publicly documented. Betty's Bay lies within the 100,000-hectare Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, South Africa's first UNESCO-designated biosphere (1998). The reserve includes the town itself, its coastal ecosystems, freshwater lakes, dunes, and its marine protected area.



- Cape Coastal Homes describes Betty's Bay as "nestled within the 100 000 ha Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve" and as "an urban conservancy" where wildlife roams freely.
- The Betty's Bay Marine Protected Area — home to the endangered African penguin colony — is explicitly part of the core zone of the UNESCO Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve.
- Local conservation organisations, including the Betty's Bay Conservancy and CapeNature, operate specifically because the town is situated inside the biosphere and must uphold its conservation ethos.
- The biosphere is not a distant mountain concept. It is our coastline, our lakes, our dunes, our gardens, our roads, our homes. It is the living system we inhabit every day.
- The signs erected at the entrances to Betty's Bay clearly state: "Welcome to Betty's Bay, part of the Kogelberg Biosphere."



To claim otherwise is to erase the ecological truth of Betty's Bay and to clear the way for development that would irreversibly damage the very environment that sells this place as a tourist mecca.

Recent municipal messaging and campaigns emphasising tourism growth have begun promoting Betty's Bay as a future "tourism hub", with increased visitor numbers, expanded commercial zones, and intensified infrastructure. **A proposed shopping complex next to Crassula Hall is beyond comprehension. Do we really need this?**

To be clear, tourism, when carefully managed, can support conservation. **The new hiking trail is a great example of responsible tourism.**

But tourism without ecological limits, tourism that treats the environment as an expendable backdrop rather than a living system, threatens everything that makes Betty's Bay unique.

The argument that Betty's Bay is "outside the biosphere" is not merely an innocent misunderstanding; it is a narrative that has the effect of weakening environmental protections, reducing conservation obligations, and justifying development that would never be permissible within a recognised biosphere reserve.

If accepted, this narrative:

- undermines biosphere zoning and conservation guidelines
- increases pressure for commercial expansion
- threatens wildlife corridors and breeding sites
- accelerates habitat loss in wetlands, dunes, and fynbos
- places the African Penguin colony and other species at even greater risk.

This is not a theoretical concern. We already see wetlands filled with building rubble, large houses replacing natural vegetation, and wildlife displaced from areas they once freely roamed.



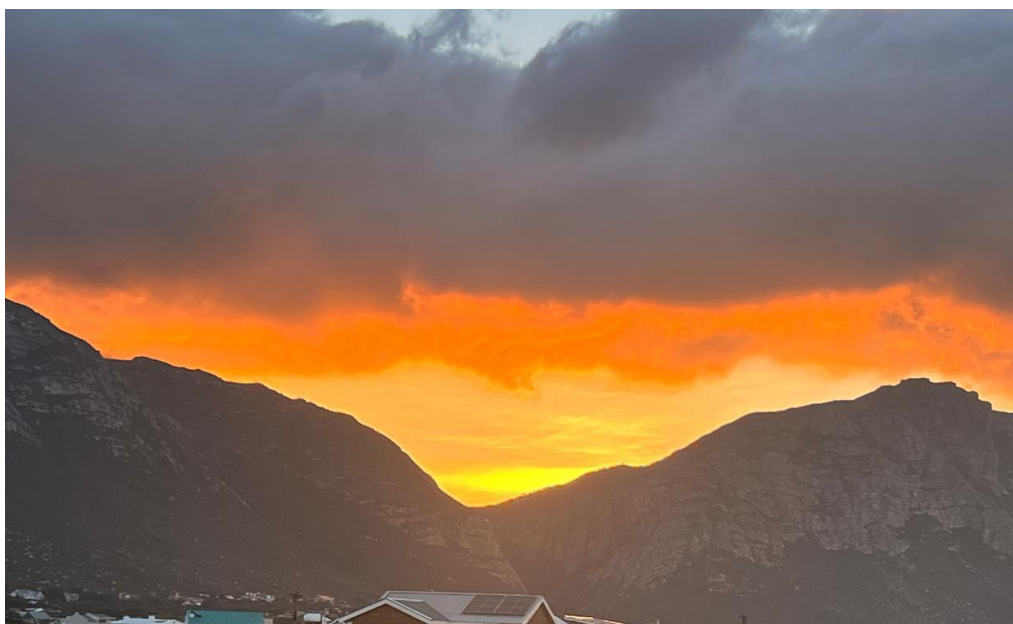
The Kogelberg Biosphere is globally exceptional. It contains the highest concentration of plant biodiversity per square kilometre anywhere on Earth, with over 1,600 fynbos species, many of them endemic.

Our dunes, lakes, coastal vegetation, and marine ecosystems form an interconnected ecological web. The biosphere designation exists precisely to ensure that human activity remains compatible with this fragile environment.

If Betty's Bay is to remain a sanctuary rather than yet another overdeveloped concrete landscape, we must reaffirm our commitment to conservation. EIAs (Environmental Impact Assessments) must be completed responsibly. We must all play some role in digging in our heels and saying: enough. We'll support development only when it respects and protects our wildlife.



Betty's Bay can strengthen its biosphere identity by enforcing conservation-aligned development rules, protecting wetlands and dunes, limiting paving, using indigenous vegetation, and managing traffic impacts on Clarence Drive. Maintaining wildlife corridors, safeguarding the African Penguin colony and marine ecosystems, and ensuring humane baboon management are essential to preserving ecological integrity. A shift toward low-impact, nature-based tourism — supported by initiatives like the new hiking trail — reinforces this ethos. Local conservation groups (BBC, Hackers, CapeNature and BotSoc) must be empowered to guide decisions, while clear signage, community workshops, and school programmes help residents and visitors understand that living in a biosphere carries shared responsibility.



The truth is simple: **Betty's Bay is part of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. It always has been. And it is our responsibility and privilege to protect it.**

Patrick Boltler

WILDLIFE

UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED WILDLIFE SIGNS FOR BETTY'S BAY



The BBC was disappointed that Overstrand Municipality Traffic Services informed the BBRA that they did not support the proposed wildlife signs. On 2 October, the BBC sent a letter to Rudi Fraser of Traffic Services with suggestions and a request to engage with him about the signs. To date, we have received no response, and we will follow up on our email.

<https://bettysbayconservancy.co.za/letter-from-the-bettys-bay-conservancy-on-the-proposed-road-signs-in-bettys-bay-2-october-2026/>

Carol Clark

BBC4thSATURDAY EVENTS

24 OCTOBER: THE CAPE'S UNIQUE COWRIES

On 24 October, Anton Mauve will be presenting on the fascinating topic of Cowrie shells.



BBC 4th Saturday

The Cape's Unique Cowries

Another reason why Betty's Bay is a treasure trove of biodiversity

Presenter: Anton Mauve

Date: 24 October
Venue: Stony Point Eco Venue
Time: 2:00 – 3:30 pm
ALL WELCOME
Please RSVP to:
bettybayconservancy@gmail.com
or WhatsApp 079 7530166

No charge; donations to support the BBC are welcomed

BETTY'S BAY CONSERVANCY

Anton Mauve has an extensive worldwide collection of cowries that he has acquired and studied for decades. Now a summertime Betty's Bay resident, Anton will share the wonders of the special cowries off *our* coastline, what makes them unique among the world's cowries, some of the people who have pioneered and advanced our knowledge of this species, and Betty's Bay's special examples.

Anton, a geologist, will also share his journey through South Africa's fossil record to find the possible common ancestor of the species unique to our waters that was recently named after him.

SAVE THE DATE: PENGUIN PALOOZA AT STONY POINT

CapeNature will host their annual Penguin Palooza on Saturday 7 November.

BBC will have a table at the event

SOMETHING TO LEARN

BIRDS, BEASTS, BOTANICALS, BIOLOGY OR BROADER...

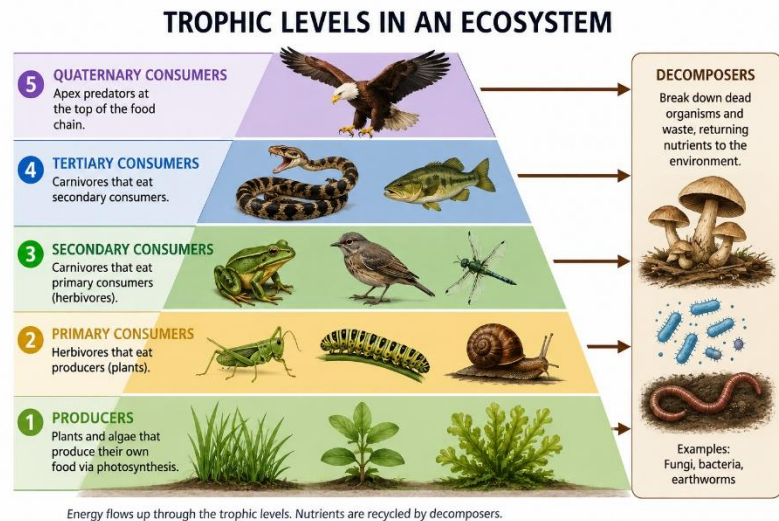
ECOSYSTEMS AND OUR EFFECT ON NATURE

We need to understand that Nature is not just the bird outside the window, the mongoose scampering along the road, or the protea blooming magnificently in the veld. These are all parts of nature. Nature in its wholeness is far more complicated, with incredible, detailed links between every aspect. If we view or treat Nature as a component (a bird, mongoose, or protea), we misunderstand.

One of the easiest ways to understand an ecosystem, the levels of organisms and their function, is through trophic levels as illustrated.

Typically, you can consider five levels, with a sixth acting on each level.

- **PRODUCERS:** the basic level and most numerous are the plants and algae that produce their own food via photosynthesis, i.e., utilising the sun's energy and “raw materials” they obtain through their roots or into their cells.
- **PRIMARY CONSUMERS:** the first level of animals that consume or live off the producers. These are herbivores (plant eaters), e.g., animals, insects, and snails.
- **SECONDARY CONSUMERS:** carnivores that eat the herbivores.
- **TERTIARY CONSUMERS:** carnivores that eat secondary consumers,
- **QUATERNARY CONSUMERS:** the apex predator at the top of the food chain.



Sometimes the distinction between trophic levels is blurred with omnivores such as baboons, bears, and humans; i.e., they eat the Producers, the Primary consumers, and sometimes the Tertiary consumers.

Acting on all these levels are the **DECOMPOSERS**: animals, bacteria, and fungi, which break down dead organisms or their waste. When they die, the nutrients built up in the trophic levels return to the environment and are reutilised. The levels depend on those below them and sometimes those above. The decomposers depend on all levels.



If something disturbs or compromises organisms at a level of an ecosystem, it can affect other trophic levels. Natural disturbances include changes in organisms, weather, droughts, and overpopulation. A healthy ecosystem can absorb these impacts and recover. Even if the impacts are catastrophic and cause permanent, irreversible change, this is still part of a natural process. Humans often inflict “unnatural disturbances” on an ecosystem, which may strain its natural resilience and capacity to restore.

Understanding the unnatural impact that humans have on ecosystems, what should our response be?

Firstly, we need to work together. One person trying desperately to hold back the tide of ecosystem damage might do little, despite their valiant efforts. However, if we work together, we can make a positive impact on our village's ecosystem. In Betty's Bay, we have a well-defined natural area, and because the village is relatively small, we can achieve a lot together.

Secondly, we need to be realistic, honest, and really understand our impact on the ecosystem.

Some people say, “They (some animal) were here first!” While potentially true, this may be unhelpful. We cannot focus on a single species, or small group of species, and ignore the rest. If we do, we may

have less well-understood or visible impact that could damage the very species we are concerned about.

What if WE were here first and the other species came later? Should we disregard that species? Think of the African Penguins - a species in dire straits, literally on the verge of extinction. We need common sense, preparedness to work together, to change ourselves and to reduce our impact on Nature. Something we think is a small impact may have a huge ripple effect or catastrophic impacts on other species,



I invite you to look at the suburbs and areas of Betty's Bay, at the east and west edges of Betty's Bay, the open areas and plots there, and at aerial pictures on Google Earth. The sad fact is that Betty's Bay is no longer the place it was when "they" first got here. It is a heavily modified residential town. Mosaic patches of semi-pristine and less-impacted areas exist, but it is an impacted landscape and ecosystem. We are having a major, ongoing, and ever-increasing deleterious effect on nature in the Betty's Bay ecosystem.

If we accept that we cause problems, we need to make choices: The best decision is to take responsibility for ourselves, our actions, the consequences on nature, and do what we can to minimise and repair the daily damage.

What damage? What can I do? What impact can I really make? Isn't it too late?

Richard Davids

Photos: Ella Fourie and Carol Clark

CLOSING THOUGHT

