



NUWEJAARS SMA AND ELIM 20 July 2017

On a wet wintery day in July, 13 enthusiasts set off for the Nuwejaars Special Management Area (SMA) near Elim. The SMA arose from the dream of 25 landowners to conserve the ecologically critical wetland on their properties and its biodiversity. They have committed their private land, bordering on the Agulhas National Park, to conservation and sustainable farming into perpetuity.



After a short talk about the Nuwejaars Wetlands SMA approach to socio-economic sustainability, we all piled into the sightseeing bus.



Guide Eugene challenged us to see the hippos in the Waskraal vlei.



We failed, but Morgan Hendricks snapped a beautiful Fish Eagle.



The buffalo breeding facility is part of a bigger programme breeding very valuable disease-free buffalo. There is also a quagga breeding programme (in which they back-breed to a colour variant of the zebra).

The birders on the trip were thrilled with the variety of birds in the wetland. Special sightings included several Blue Cranes, Denham's Bustard, Agulhas Long-billed Lark and many others. We sadly did not spot the Hottentot Buttonquail.

Following the wetland tour we hurried to lunch in the historic village of Elim. Aunt Chrissie of the Waterfront Café gave personal insight into life in Elim.

The mission station at Elim was established in 1824, when German missionaries arrived at the Cape.



The Elim Moravian Church was built in 1835, and is one of a few places of worship built in the Cape Dutch style. The bell dates from 1746.

Following their emancipation in 1834, many slaves were left destitute by their former masters. Some found refuge at the Moravian mission stations. The country's first slave monument was built in 1938, a century after emancipation, in homage to the people who had become the majority of the Elim community.



Many of the cottages are still original with thatch roofs, a skill at which Elim men are still very adept and sought-after.



The water mill, which used to grind the flour for the local bakery, was restored to its original state and declared a national monument in 1974. Sadly, it is again in need of restoration.



The Elim Museum is well worth a visit.

Elim is still owned by the Moravian Church and no-one who is not a member of the church may stay there. The village has national heritage status.

We thank the Nuwejaars Wetland Team for the most interesting tour. They can be contacted at www.nuwejaars.com

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