Publications relating to biodiversity on Robben Island

Iñaki Romero Iraola, Les G Underhill, Richard B Sherley

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Iñaki Romero Iraola[1,2,3], *Les G Underhill*[3,4*] & *Richard B Sherley*[5,6§]

[1]*Global Training Programme, University of the Basque Country, Bilbao, Spain*

[2]*Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi. Departamento de Herpetología, Paseo de Zorroaga 11, 20014 Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain*

[3]*Biodiversity and Development Institute, 25 Old Farm Road, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa*

[4]*Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701 South Africa*

[5]*Centre for Ecology and Conservation, University of Exeter, Penryn Campus, Cornwall TR10 9FE, UK*

[6]*Department of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, University of the Western Cape, Bellville 7535, South Africa*

[*]*les.underhill@uct.ac.za*

[§]*r.sherley@exeter.ac.uk*

Introduction

Robben Island (33°47'S, 18°21'E), located in Table Bay, Cape Town, South Africa, is globally renowned for its historical and political significance, most notably as the site of Nelson Mandela's long imprisonment (Deacon 2004). However, beyond its legacy of resilience and human rights, the island also holds great ecological value. As a protected area and UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1999, Robben Island plays a crucial role within South Africa's broader biodiversity framework. It supports a range of endemic and migratory species, including important seabird populations such as African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* and Bank Cormorants *Phalacrocorax neglectus*. The island's unique terrestrial and marine ecosystems contribute to regional conservation goals, particularly in preserving coastal and marine biodiversity. Robben Island serves as a living laboratory for ecological monitoring, restoration efforts, and environmental education, highlighting the interconnectedness of cultural heritage and natural conservation.

Underhill & Barham (2016) and Sherley et al. (2024) answered the question: "What research has been done on the biodiversity of Robben Island and been published?" These two bibliographies contained a list of more than 200 publications relating to the biodiversity of Robben Island.

The focus of the two bibliographies (Underhill & Barham 2016, Sherley et al. 2024) was on birds, but they covered all aspects of biodiversity. However, these bibliographies were simply lists of information, and users had to search for the publications themselves. Many of them were not readily accessible, either because they were not Open Access, or because they were unpublished reports, frequently student projects at below master's level.

We report here that we have taken the concept of bibliography one step further and have compiled a near-complete collection of the actual publications themselves, rather than a list of them. We have added a few new publications, and old ones that have been located. A spreadsheet which contains the list of publications can be downloaded from this website link. The spreadsheet is more useful than a table reproduced here because it can be sorted to meet user objectives.

Paper copies of the publications have been deposited in the library of the Robben Island Museum (RIM), located in the Multipurpose Learning Centre on Robben Island. Electronic copies of the

publications are held by the UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives at the University of the Western Cape and by the Niven Library at the University of Cape Town and are available there. It is not possible to place copies of all the publications on an Open Access website, because there are complex and multiple restrictions on their availability.

These 200 publications provide baseline knowledge, historical context and perspective, information relating to long-term data sets, and insights into species, ecosystems, and human impacts. This platform of knowledge will enable researchers to design better studies, avoid redundant work and measure change. It will also help to identify knowledge gaps, and to guide policy and management decisions.

Uses

This collection of publications serves at least three purposes.

It makes the biodiversity component of the literature relating to Robben Island broadly available to scholars from all disciplines. For example. Professor Leslie Witz (University of the Western Cape) is a social historian focused on museums and heritage. It was serendipity that linked him to our biodiversity research, so that his book chapter about the transformation of Robben Island from prison to museum (Witz 2022), could cite Quintana et al. (2021). This initiative will enable these kinds of transdisciplinary interactions to become routine, because the research output of the biodiversity sector is no longer siloed out of sight.

It will also enable the Robben Island Museum, a World Heritage Site, to demonstrate the use to which the island has been put to undertake research related to biodiversity conservation. There are unlikely to be many World Heritage Sites which have accomplished more than the 200 publications reported here.

It will enable new students, doing research on Robben Island, to hit the ground running because a large component of their literature survey is easily available. Many of these papers, and especially the student projects, have previously been almost inaccessible. For example, Dickens (2005), though listed in Underhill & Barham (2016), was a fascinating but unfindable fourth-year project in the UCT Department of Oceanography, at the interface between Oceanography and Biology.

Keeping this up-to-date

We will endeavour to keep the set of pdfs publications up-to-date. However, when the spreadsheet is downloaded from the link above, the version will be at the time of this publication. To obtain the current version, go to this blog, which will be updated as new publications become available.

Acknowledgements

The next sentence is written on behalf of all researchers, at all levels, who have done research on Robben Island. We celebrate the huge contribution to our research made by the Robben Island Museum, over a period of decades. This body of research belongs not only to us, but also to the museum. Our desire is that Robben Island Museum takes ownership of this impressive contribution to science and uses it whenever it can to promote the museum's commitment to biodiversity conservation.

Several key publications were found and scanned by Janine Dunlop, librarian at the Niven Library, FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town. We value her ongoing support.

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Biodiversity Observations

The scope of Biodiversity Observations includes papers describing observations about biodiversity in general, including animals, plants, algae and fungi. This includes observations of behaviour, breeding and flowering patterns, distributions and range extensions, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and colouration/ plumage variations. Biotic interactions such as pollination, fruit dispersal, herbivory and predation fall within the scope, as well as the use of indigenous and exotic species by humans. Observations of naturalized plants and animals will also be considered. Biodiversity Observations will also publish a variety of other interesting or relevant biodiversity material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, book reviews and any other appropriate material. Further details and guidelines to authors are on the journal website (https://journals.uct.ac.za/index.php/BO/).

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