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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROB BEN ISLAND FOR BIRDS: A COLLECTION OF RESEARCH PAPERS

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROBBERN ISLAND FOR BIRDS: A COLLECTION OF RESEARCH PAPERS

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Introduction

Robben Island is a place of many spaces. The most conspicuous are cultural space, heritage space, historical space, tourism space, biodiversity space and research space. This bibliography focuses on the intersection of the final two spaces on this list. It answers the question: “What research has been done on the biodiversity of Robben Island?” Birds are prominent in this bibliography, but this reflects the emphasis of the research to date.

This bibliography has two goals. To disseminate our findings to as wide an audience as possible and in this way to advance the conservation project on the Island. And, secondly, to ensure that research in future is optimal, helping the environment and supporting the heritage role entrusted to the Robben Island Museum. We believe that the working relationship developed between researchers and the Museum over many years is an excellent platform from which to achieve both goals. We hope that this collection of papers will further strengthen these links and open up while also protecting the many spaces of the Island to as many communities as possible.

The focus here is on product, not process. The bibliography is a record of research taken all the way to its logical conclusion which, from a scientific perspective, is publication.

This list of publications provides a record of the research for which Robben Island, either solely or to a large measure, has been the primary data collection platform. The papers cover many bird species, with a main focus on the seabirds, and especially the “Endangered” African Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*. A few papers dealing with other taxa are also included. However, the reality is that the research priority of the biodiversity scientists on the island has been seabirds.

One step is missing. We not provide a direct answer to the key questions: “What needs to be done to improve the conservation status of the birds of Robben Island?” And how can Robben Island Museum facilitate this work?” Although there are no answers here to these questions, the research undertaken on the island is a solid platform of the knowledge which needs to underpin conservation initiatives.

Since 2001, Robben Island has hosted an Earthwatch project, entitled Southern African Penguins (details of this project are available at <http://earthwatch.org/expeditions/south-african-penguins>).

Earthwatch is an NGO which connects volunteers with research projects, with projects carefully selected so that the volunteers are able to make a decisive contribution to data collection. The teams of Earthwatch volunteers have, over the past 16 years, made a remarkable contribution to documenting the breeding productivity of the penguin colony. The leadership of the project has done the analyses of these data, and a series of papers has emerged. The Earthwatch project has also partially supported a number of postgraduate students who have done their fieldwork on the island. All the papers arising from fieldwork and research done by Earthwatch volunteers or students supported by Earthwatch are marked (EW) in the bibliography.

Since the establishment of the Robben Island Museum in 1996, the museum has supported this research. The monetary value of this contribution has been enormous: ferry trips, accommodation and logistics. We acknowledge and appreciate this support. This bibliography represents the return on this investment.

Bibliography

The major theme of this bibliography is seabirds, with more papers and theses related to the African Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* than any other species. The second largest theme consists of waders, with a focus on the African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini*. There are some interesting outliers to these main research areas. There are four papers and theses which relate to mammals (Aitken 1999, Edwards 2004, de Villiers et al. 2010, Sherley 2016), four which relate to reptiles (Branch 1971, Dyer 1996, Calf 2004, Underhill et al. 2009) and one which relates to spiders (Mukherjee et al. 2010).

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