

# SEPTEMBER NEWS

RESEARCH - CONSERVATION - EDUCATION



## TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

### RESCUE & RESILIENCE:

Plett Community Unites to Save Critically Endangered Seahorses.



### READ MORE

1079 endangered Knysna seahorses picked up along Lookout beach!

### READ MORE



Despite the adverse weather conditions, including September's floods and large swells, we persevered and carved out valuable time to explore both Robberg and the open sea with the Ocean Blue Adventures team. For a detailed account of our remarkable sightings and experiences last month, please turn to page 3.

**WHAT DID WE  
MANAGE TO SEE  
WITH SEPTEMBER'S  
BAD WEATHER?**

# RESCUE AND RESILIENCE:



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## PLETT COMMUNITY UNITES TO SAVE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SEAHORSES. By Melissa Nel

In late September, our dedicated Plett Stranding Network, which includes our researcher Melissa and field assistant Julene, received an urgent call regarding a significant event on Lookout Beach: a mass stranding of Knysna seahorses.

The Knysna seahorse, a species classified as critically endangered, faced this dire situation. Although not exploited for traditional medicines, these seahorses are documented as the most endangered among their kind worldwide, according to the IUCN's Red Data Book. This grim status primarily stems from their extremely limited habitat range, confined to a few select southern Cape estuaries.

In response to the distress signal shared on social media, the Plettenberg Bay community rallied together in a remarkable display of unity. Hundreds of local residents and visitors rushed to the beach, armed with buckets, in search of stranded seahorses. The recent heavy rains had led to the flooding of the Keurbooms River, resulting in powerful water currents that swept away the seagrass beds within the estuary, the vital habitat of these seahorses. Consequently, they were washed out to sea during the outgoing tide and eventually found themselves back on the beach, courtesy of the incoming waves.

**“1,079 critically endangered Knysna seahorses stranded on Lookout Beach, with 737 successfully released back into their habitat.”**

Cape Nature swiftly implemented a series of protocols to manage the situation. All rescued seahorses were brought to the lifeguard tower, where volunteers meticulously counted and sorted them into categories: strong, weak, or deceased. A dedicated team of volunteers then carefully released the healthy seahorses into a safe and tranquil area within the estuary, nestled among the eelgrass. The weaker seahorses received stabilization and care overnight, with subsequent release the following day. Meanwhile, the deceased seahorses were preserved for further examination by seahorse experts and researchers.

This collective effort showcased the incredible commitment of our community to the preservation of nature. The final tally of this rescue mission speaks volumes: a total of 1,079 seahorses were collected, with **737 successfully released back** into their habitat, while 342 unfortunately did not survive.







# COMMUNITY CORNER:

## GROWTH, EXPLORATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.

By Kade Howorth

### »»» THRIVING SIYAKULA GARDEN AND POLLINATOR OASIS:

The Siyakula garden is flourishing with an abundance of healthy plants, ensuring a steady supply of fresh produce for the children's lunches over the coming months. Notably, we've introduced vibrant flowering plants like lavender and pansies, creating a welcoming haven for pollinators, thus enhancing the garden's biodiversity.

### »»» THE RIVER SURVEY PROJECT:

Our latest venture involves conducting a comprehensive river survey within the Keurbooms estuary. Our objective is to assess various water quality parameters, including surface temperature and salinity, while also documenting the distribution and abundance of the diverse array of wildlife residing in this vital ecosystem.



### A POST-WEATHER CLEANUP INITIATIVE:

Following the recent extreme weather events, our team embarked on an extensive cleanup operation along Salt River, Keurbooms Beach, and Robberg Beach. We successfully removed approximately 10 kilograms of plastic waste from these areas, underlining our commitment to preserving the beauty and integrity of our local coastal environments.





# OCEAN SIGHTINGS REPORT

## >>> SEPTEMBER'S ROBBERG OBSERVATION SESSIONS:

Throughout the month of September, our committed team conducted bi-weekly observation sessions at Robberg. However, we encountered a challenging month with just **a single great white shark sighting**. Adverse conditions, including rain, turbid brown river water, strong winds, and large swell, significantly impacted our observation efforts, making it more difficult to spot these magnificent creatures.

## >>> CETACEAN SIGHTINGS WITH OCEAN BLUE ADVENTURES

**“The highlight had to be watching 800 Common dolphins charismatically breach, tail-slap and bow ride all around us. What a humbling experience!”**

For the September opportunistic boat-based research where we collect data on the marine life seen in Plettenberg Bay and observe the behaviors of whales and dolphins, we did not get out to sea much as the sea conditions have been unfavorable due to heavy storms and flooding in the Western Cape area. But with a silver lining that resulted in us attending lots of seal and seabird strandings. This gave the volunteers great practical experience in the marine animal stranding response sector.

**We successfully conducted 18 surveys and spent a total of 26 and a half hours out at sea.**



## ➤➤➤ CETACEANS

We still managed to have sighted a total of 208 whales of which 201 were the placid Southern right whales, 2 Humpback whales, 5 of the elusive Bryde's whales. And a total of 1855 dolphins of which 4 were the rare and endangered Humpback dolphins, 1051 Bottlenose dolphins and 800 Common dolphins.

## ➤➤➤ BIRDS

Lastly, we sighted 83 'other sightings', which included migratory seabird species such as the Cape Gannet, Sub-Antarctic Skua and the endangered Southern Giant petrel.

## ➤➤➤ TRAINING

The ORCA volunteers are also given the opportunity to receive marine guide training and assist the guiding experience of the whale-watching boats. This gives them hands-on experience and soft skills not only in the marine conservation area but also in the sustainable tourism industry, which normally go hand-in-hand.

# THANK YOU FOR READING.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT ANY OF THESE CONSERVATION & EDUCATION EFFORTS PLEASE DONT HESITATE TO CONTACT US ON [BOOKINGS@ORCAFOUNDATION.COM](mailto:BOOKINGS@ORCAFOUNDATION.COM)**

