



Indicates some water bodies where the Cape and Common Platanna can be found in the Cape of Good Hope area.

## WHAT CAN I DO FOR TOMORROW?

- Learn about and become involved in the protection of natural water bodies, wetlands and your own environment, by joining a Friends of the CPNP group or other environmental organisations. Contact the Park, or see the Environmental Resource Directory, available from City of Cape Town, Tel. 021 487 2839, for details of community-based organisations.
- Plant locally indigenous plants in your garden.
- Visit and support your National Parks.

## FURTHER READING

- Fraser, M & McMahon, L. 1994. *Between Two Shores, Flora and Fauna of the Cape of Good Hope*. David Philip Publishers.
- Jolliffe, D. 1994. *The dietary habits of the endangered platanna Xenopus gilli in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve*. Unpublished research paper.
- Picker, M.D. & De Villiers, A. L. 1989. *The distribution and conservation status of Xenopus gilli (Anura: Pipidae)*. *Biological Conservation* 49. Elsevier Science Publishers.
- Passmore, N.I. & Carruther, V.C. 1979. *South African Frogs*. Witwatersrand University Press.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- In the early part of the previous century the Common Platanna; *Xenopus laevis* was used to establish if a woman was pregnant.
- The Cape Platanna cannibalises its own young.
- The difference between a frog and a toad is that a frog jumps and a toad walks on all fours.

Cape Peninsula  National Park

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# THE CAPE PLATANNA: From Past to Present



Cape Peninsula National Park  
— A park for all, forever —



Frogs and toads have fascinated people throughout the ages. From fables such as the 'Frog Prince' to old wives' tales about warts, they are the source of interesting stories.

The Cape Platanna has an interesting story of its own. This rare species is quite unique, as it prefers the seasonal and high acidic levels of the black water lakelets of the Cape Floral Kingdom. This differs from its cousin the Common Platanna where it prefers permanent standing water bodies and lower acidic levels. It (the Cape Platanna) is therefore only found in the southwestern region of South Africa, and here it is becoming one of the most endangered amphibians in the world. Its story gives a view on the history of land management and conservation practices in the area that is now the Cape Peninsula National Park.



*Juvenile Cape Platanna on a hand*

Commonly known as the Cape Platanna, *Xenopus gilli* has a small head, larger body measuring some 5cm from snout to vent, dark stripes on the back and mottled patterns on the stomach.

## WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY...

The Cape Platanna has faced many threats. At the Cape of Good Hope, as in other areas in the southwestern Cape, unwise land development and management practices contributed to the threatened status of this species.

In the early years various farming practices and the construction of dams destroyed the Cape Platanna's natural habitats. In what was then the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, management's decision to create a game farm led to the introduction of fauna alien to the area. To cater for these animals some of the natural wetlands were excavated to create waterholes. Alien plants such as Rooikranse were introduced to stabilise sand dunes.

As the Cape and Common platannas came to inhabit the same water bodies, they started to interbreed, resulting in hybrid populations. This hybridisation began to drive the Cape Platanna further toward extinction, because the hybrid males are sterile. Not only were there ever fewer suitable habitats for the Cape Platanna, but its attempts to breed were now also less successful.

On realising the impacts on the Cape Platanna, scientists and managers came up with various suggestions to save the rare species. These included blasting with dynamite, biochemical poisons, the introduction of alien predatory fish and electric shock treatments, to permanently remove the Common Platanna. For research purposes, the method of tattooing the belly of the platannas was proposed.

Thankfully these suggestions were not implemented. Over time scientists became more knowledgeable and concerned about not just single species, but the ecosystem as a whole.



*A Cape River frog inhabits the same black water lakelets as the Cape Platanna*



*Conservation students and staff conducting Cape Platanna surveys*

Many lessons from the past resulted in substantial changes in conservation practices, as managers started to approach conservation holistically.

Steps were taken by erecting a vibracrete wall around one of the dams, into which Cape Platannas were released.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY...

Today we are assessing our actions, past and present, by surveying the Cape Platanna population (see accompanying photo's) and comparing the results with previous surveys, with a view to establishing an environmental management plan for addressing issues holistically. The Frog Atlas Project has contributed valuable research information

Resources and stronger legislation became available with a change in the conservation status of the area, when the Cape Peninsula National Park was proclaimed in 1998. This proclamation recognized the area's importance as a national asset.

Steps have been taken to rehabilitate the disturbed habitats through alien clearing programmes for the eradication of all alien vegetation on the Peninsula, and the removal of alien fauna is also under way. These actions are to benefit not only single threatened species such as *Xenopus gilli*, but entire ecosystems.