NATURE'S VALLEY
CONSERVANCY / ULONDOLOZO / BEWAREA

Responsible Pet Owners

This is a truth that many pet owners seem unwilling to accept. We love our dogs, cats and other pets. Really, really love them. Estimates suggest that over half of the global population have a pet at home. Over the centuries, they've transformed from working beasts to cherished family members. The idea that your kitty is unleashing a wave of destruction on the local birds – or that our pet obsession is unleashing a wave of destruction on global wildlife.

A love for animals, including pets, is often said to go hand in hand with environmentalism. It sounds good in theory, and it's true that many environmentalists are also animal lovers. But the reality is that, when it comes to priorities, pets greatly outrank wildlife.

Outdoor cats killed somewhere in the ballpark of 2.4 billion birds and 12.3 billion small mammals in the U.S. per year—far exceeding any other human-influenced cause of avian death, such as pesticides or collisions with windows.

The story of Tibbles the cat, who travelled with her owner to an untouched island south of New Zealand in 1894. There, she single-pawedly caused the extinction of the Stephens Island wren, a small, flightless bird found only in that part of the world.

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/moral-cost-of-cats-180960505/

If you love pets, reading Peter Christie's new book Unnatural Companions: Rethinking Our Love of Pets in an Age of Wildlife Extinction.



Christie documents a startling array of issues associated with pets: free-roaming dogs and cats killing wildlife, the pet trade depleting wild bird and reptile populations, pet food depleting wild fisheries and increasing meat production and much more.

His conclusion is clear: “[Pet owning] is threatening the very diversity of life…that we’re evolutionarily programmed to cherish.”

Free-roaming or released pets, for instance, are major invasive species around the globe. Cats and dogs are directly responsible for the extinction of 74 species, a toll that places them among the most destructive invasives. Free-ranging cats in the United States are one of the biggest killers of birds out there, far more than publicized threats like windows and wind farms.

The pet industry even contributes to overfishing and increased meat production. One researcher, with a paper published in the journal PLOS ONE, noted that if dogs and cats were their own country, they would be the world’s fifth largest meat consumer.

As Christie notes, “we spend more on the pet industry than most nations earn in a year.” People spend exorbitantly on their companion animals, buying gourmet food, daycare services, toys, clothes and even the services of pet fortune tellers. This amounts to an approximately $75 billion a year industry in the United States alone. Compare that to the global expenditure of some $21 billion for the conservation of all wildlife species.

I (Matthew Miller*) once wrote a story about research on how the presence of leopards in neighbourhoods of Mumbai lowered the risk of rabies. One of the main prey species for the leopards was feral dogs. Fewer feral dogs meant fewer cases of rabies, thus meaning that a neighbourhood leopard saved human lives. Feral dogs claim 20,000 human lives in India each year.

Perhaps pet owners can harness their love of animals to protect the beautiful diversity of the globe before it’s too late. After all, pet owners represent one of the largest interest groups out there. Harnessing their innate connection to other creatures could make a difference.

Pets and the carbon footprint

Promote Sustainable Pet Food Consumption
The modern food system is responsible for 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with meat consumption alone accounting for about 60% of the total.

Pets account for a significant carbon footprint. According to Gregory Okin, a professor from the University of California Los Angeles, our pets’ meat consumption generates about 64 million tons of carbon dioxide annually in the US, the equivalent of driving 13.6 million cars.

In the US alone, pets’ diet contributes to 25-30% of the environmental impact of meat consumption. Here, the amount of meat that only dogs and cats consume ranks just behind the total meat consumption of Russia, Brazil, the United States, and China.

Sustainable pet Food Alternatives
While there has yet to be a bigger boost of alternative pet food, sustainable options are on the rise.
Pet owners can choose pet food brands certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council or the Marine Stewardship Council. Food products with these certifications indicate that the protein in this food is caught legally and produced responsibly.
In the last five years, pet food products with sustainable seafood, verified by the Marine Stewardship Council, increased by 57% in the United Kingdom. In the United States, they increased by 614%.
Insect-based pet food is another way to promote sustainability.

In 2022, the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention reported that 61% of cats and 59% of dogs were obese or overweight. Therefore, feed your pet wisely.

To put things into perspective, in the USA there are 163 million dogs and cats, these generate a total of approximately 5.1 million tons of faeces annually, about the total waste generated by 6.63 million people!

Dog waste comprises various viruses, bacteria, and parasites that are transmittable and can thus harm humans and other animals. Pathogens from canine waste can remain in the soil for years and affect wildlife and vegetation. Nitrogen is also found in faeces, and, if washed into lakes or rivers, it can result in the growth of invasive algae that damage aquatic life.

As for cat waste, clay-based cat litter is not exactly sustainable, unable to break down in landfills. Simply put, it is not biodegradable. Cat owners can also take more environmentally-friendly actions when managing cat waste, such as opting for litter boxes that are produced with sustainable materials. For instance, recycled paper, grass seed, and renewable wheat are all greener alternatives to clay-based and silica-gel-based litter, as these materials can easily break down in the environment. As a pet owner, opting for environmentally-friendly pet products is an effortless way to become a more sustainable owner.
Buying toys for your cat or dog means choosing ones assembled from “natural, sustainable and biodegradable materials.”

Domestic cats are intensive hunters presenting an immediate threat to native species (Dickman and Newsome, 2015) resulting in 7 times more local extirpations and extinctions compared to dogs (Doherty et al., 2016).

Domestic dogs may range farther from human associated habitats (Young et al., 2011), are less susceptible to smaller-bodied predators (Ritchie et al., 2014), and commonly are brought by humans into remote areas for sport and other types of recreation (Wierzbowska et al., 2016). As a result, impacts from domestic cats may be intense but restricted to areas in close proximity to human dwellings, while impacts of dogs may be more pervasive across the landscape (Gompper, 2014a).









International law demands that wildlife be protected from domestic cats



Across the globe, outdoor domestic cats – pets, strays, and feral cats – threaten wildlife in various ways. They do so through direct predation, fear effects, competition, disease, and hybridization. Scientific knowledge about these problems is rapidly improving, which raises the question: what do laws for nature conservation say about outdoor cats? We addressed this question, with an emphasis on international wildlife treaties.

First, we reviewed the ample literature on the ways in which, and extent to which, outdoor cats affect native species, from birds to bats to lizards; and on potential remedies. In light of this newly synthesized knowledge, we identified and interpreted relevant legal instruments.

Lastly, we identified and explored factors that may influence the implementation of relevant legal obligations. It turns out that many international treaties already apply to outdoor domestic cats. These include, for instance:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The Convention on Migratory Species.
- The World Heritage Convention,
- and various regional legal instruments.
- The most relevant specific obligations concern
    - invasive species,
    - protected areas,
    - protected species.

Might be that such factors can to some extent explain why many governments have failed to take effective action to tackle the cat problem (or even to call it a problem). However, demonstrates that, from our analysis a legal perspective, these factors provide little ground to justify continued non-compliance with legal obligations to protect wildlife from cats.

Our analysis of these obligations shows that many governments around the world are currently required, under international law, to adopt and implement policies aimed at preventing, reducing or eliminating the biodiversity impacts of outdoor domestic cats, particularly by (i) removing feral and other unowned cats from the landscape to the greatest extent possible, and by (ii) restricting the outdoor access of owned cats. It seems, however, that many governments do not yet comply with these obligations, and that cats are a blind spot in the application of international conservation law.

Therefore, we also explored factors that may account for this blind spot. These factors include feasibility, scientific uncertainty, the interests of cat owners, and the interests of cats themselves. It might be that such factors can to some extent explain why many governments have failed to take effective action to tackle the cat problem (or even to call it a problem). However, demonstrates that, from our analysis a legal perspective, these factors provide little ground to justify continued non-compliance with legal obligations to protect wildlife from cats.

The impacts of urban domestic cats on wild prey in Cape Town and neighbouring protected areas

Domestic cats (Felis catus) have contributed to the extinction of indigenous species worldwide, but impacts in Africa are unstudied. We compare prey returned home from three questionnaire surveys (2009, 2010 and 2013/14) in Cape Town, South Africa, with footage from some of the same cats wearing animal-borne video cameras (KittyCams), to assess differences in actual predation vs. returns. Cape Town borders Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), so cats may prey on animals in a protected area. Urban edge (UE) and deep urban cats (DU) did not differ in predation rates, but the suite of species killed differed significantly. KittyCams revealed that most predation was nocturnal, and only 18% of prey recorded on video were returned home, thus cats kill 5.56 times more animals (averaged across all taxa) than returns data suggest. Reptiles constituted 50% of prey, but only 17% of returns; mammals constituted 24% of prey, but 54% of returns. Non-native species represented only 6% and 17% of animals killed by UE and DU cats, respectively, pointing to a high cost of cat predation for native fauna. Applying a correction factor of 5.56, the average domestic cat in Cape Town kills c. 90 (95% CI = 59, 123), animals.year−1.

Thus, the approximately 300 000 domestic cats in Cape Town kill c. 27.5 million animals.year−1, and TMNP is likely to lose c. 203 500 animals to UE cats annually from within its boundaries. The scale of this predation necessitates conservation options to minimise impacts of cats on wildlife, particularly near protected areas.



Impacts of dogs on wildlife

In summary, people and their dogs disturb wildlife, and people are not always aware of or willing to acknowledge the significance of their own impacts. Wildlife perceives dogs as predators. Dogs subject wildlife to physical and temporal displacement from habitat, and dog scent repels wildlife with lingering impacts. Dogs disturb wildlife which can induce long-term stress, impact animals' immune systems and reduce reproduction. Dogs spread disease to and outright kill wildlife. People with dogs are much more detrimental to wildlife than people alone; off leash dogs are worse; and off-trail impacts are highest.

Urban wildlife is subject to many human-induced stressors including habitat loss, degraded and fragmented habitat, impacts from a variety of user groups, roads, trails, infrastructure, noise and light pollution.

Impacts include:

- **Physical and temporal displacement** – The presence of dogs causes wildlife to move away, temporarily or permanently reducing the amount of available habitat in which to feed, breed and rest. Animals become less active during the day to avoid dog interactions. Furthermore, the scent of dogs repels wildlife and the effects remain after the dogs are gone.
- **Disturbance and stress response** – Animals are alarmed and cease their routine activities. This increases the amount of energy they use, while simultaneously reducing their opportunities to feed. Repeated stress causes long-term impacts on wildlife including reduced reproduction and growth, suppressed immune system and increased vulnerability to disease and parasites.
- **Indirect and direct mortality** – Dogs transmit diseases (such as canine distemper and rabies) to and from wildlife. Loose dogs kill wildlife.
- **Human disease and water quality impacts** – Dog waste pollutes water and transmits harmful parasites and diseases to people.



Negative impacts of dogs summarised:

"The evidence that dogs negatively impact wildlife is overwhelming. It is clear that people with dogs – on leash or off – are much more detrimental to wildlife than people without dogs. Dogs (Canis lupus familiaris) are considered to be a subspecies of wolves (Canis lupus), and wildlife perceive dogs as predators." – Lori Hennings.

"Dog walking caused a 41% reduction in numbers of bird individuals detected and a 35% reduction in species richness" Peter Banks & Jessica Bryant.

"The most significant negative factor was the presence of free running dogs on the beach" Katie Thomas.

"Disturbance of wildlife by recreationists may provoke anti-predator responses such as fleeing, increasing vigilance, and changes in habitat use" Arielle Parsons.

"These numbers place dogs in the number three spot after cats and rodents as the world's most damaging invasive mammalian predators." Tim Doherty

"The main threat from dogs is predation. Even if prey escapes from a dog attack, they waste large amounts of energy fleeing the dogs, leaving them exhausted and vulnerable to other predators" Rebecca Lovell.
Solutions

"Many dog walkers who visit nature reserves with their pets are unaware of the potential negative impacts on wildlife. Understanding the harm dogs cause should encourage more responsible behaviour: staying marked paths and keeping dogs on leads within sensitive conservation areas are important steps in protecting wildlife." Is wildlife the underdog? The overlooked impact of man's best friend By Rebecca Lovell, 2018.

"In addition, communication programs need to be developed to educate and engage people about the ecological impacts of domestic dogs on native species and their potential impacts on human health. How people perceive dog-wildlife interactions will be fundamental for managing the extent to which dogs are allowed to roam freely. If people see such interactions as a problem, then it would be easier to address the issue and minimize the impacts that dogs have on native ecosystems." G. Zapata-Rios.

"Keeping control of the dog on a leash, allowing off-leash time only in designated areas, and being mindful of wildlife will all reduce the direct impact of dogs" William Twardek.

In Nature's Valley keep in mind the following:

- Pets are to be kept within your property.
- Only pets on a leash or carried by a responsible pet owner are permitted within the village confines.
- Regulations for the permission of dogs on beaches are posted at every beach entrance. Please view Dog Regulations in Nature's Valley PDF.
- If possible, maintain a natural corridor between properties where behind these fences one's pets and prized gardens can thrive.
- Were possible vacant properties should have their gates open for the free access to wild animals.
- Important to note that Nature's Valley is surrounded by the Garden Route national Park and residents are urged to respect the extension of this National Park into Nature's Valley.

BITOU MUNICIPALITY BY-LAW RELATING TO PREVENTION OF PUBLIC NUISANCES AND PUBLIC NUISANCES ARISING FROM THE KEEPING OF ANIMALS

Under the provisions of section 156 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 the Bitou Municipality enacts as follows:

10. (1) Duties of owner or keeper of animal The owner or keeper of an animal – (a) may not cause or allow an animal to interfere with the comfort, convenience, peace or quiet of other people; (b) must provide such animal with shelter, water and proper food ; (c) must maintain the premises on which an animal is kept in good repair and in a neat condition in order to prevent the occurrence of a public nuisance; and (d) (e) (2) must exercise control over his or her animals in order to prevent damage to property or gardens; may not leave or allow any animal to be on any section of a public road or leave such animal in a place from where it may stray onto such section of a public road. A person who contravenes a provision of subsection (1) commits an offence.

CHAPTER 3 PROVISIONS RELATING TO KEEPING OF DOGS, CATS AND PETS
Part 1 – General Provisions relating to dogs, cats and pets

14. Number of dogs and cats
(1) Subject to the provisions of section 15,
No person may, without the permission of the municipality, keep on any premises
(a) more than two dogs;
(b) and more than two cats.
(2) An application for permission in terms of subsection (1) must be submitted on an application form obtainable from the municipality and must contain an exposition of the breed, gender and number of dogs or cats applied for.
(3) A restriction imposed under section 17 on the number of animals that may be kept on premises does not apply for a period of 10 weeks after the birth of a litter from an animal kept in terms of a permit.
(4) A person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence.

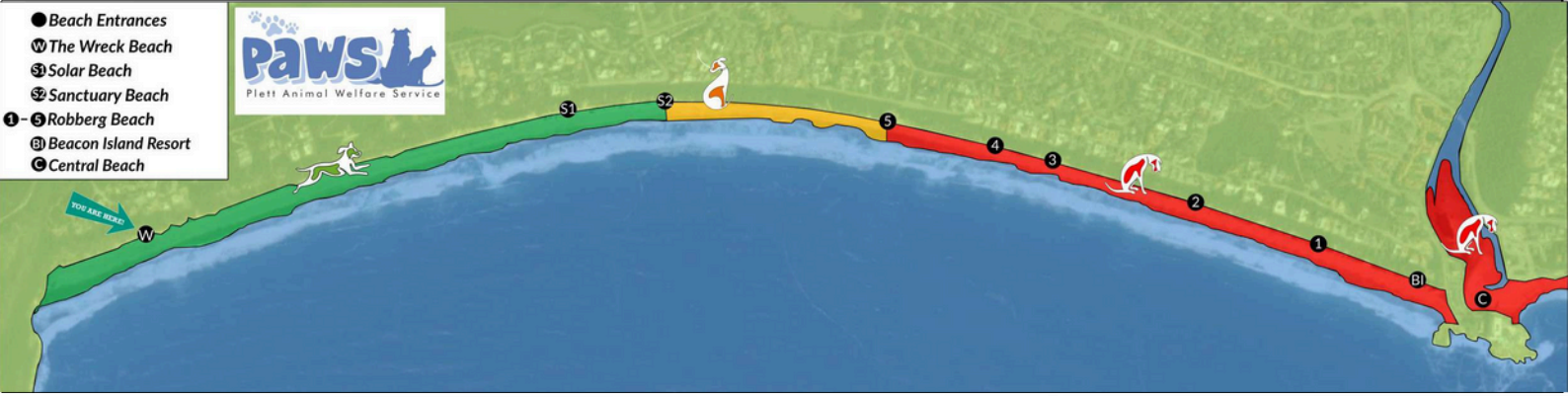
15.Breeders of dogs and cats
A breeder of dogs or cats who wishes to keep more than two dogs or cats must obtain permission from the municipality. (2) The municipality may require the submission of plans and specifications of structures in which it is proposed to keep the dogs or cats as well as a site plan indicating all existing or proposed structures and fences on the premises. (3) A person who fails to obtain the permission of the municipality as required in subsection (1) commits an offence.

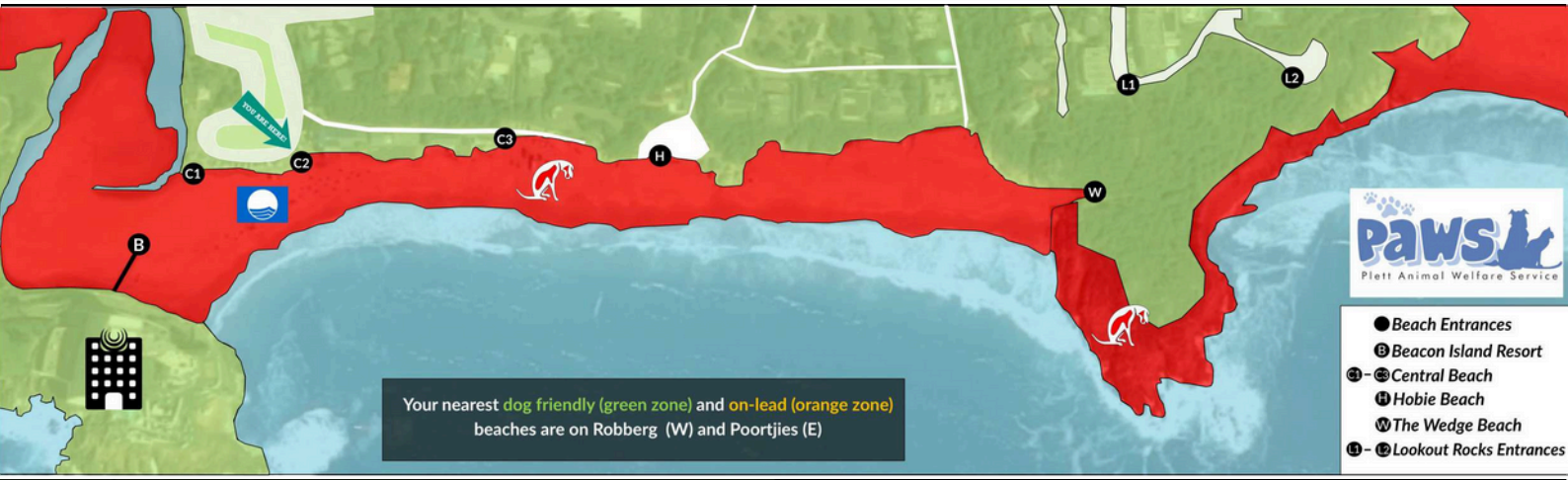
16. Breeders of pets
(1) A person who breeds pets must obtain the approval of the municipality.
(2) The provisions of section are with the necessary adjustment applicable to an application in terms subsection (1).

19. Dogs or cats in streets or public places
(1) Subject to the provisions of the Public Amenities By-law, the owner or keeper of a dog or cat may not bring or allow it in a street or public place unless the dog is on a leash or the cat is under physical control.
(2)Except in the event of a blind person being led by a guide dog, a person in charge of a dog in a street or public place, must remove any faeces left by the dog by wrapping it in paper or plastic and disposing of it in a receptacle provided for litter or refuse.
(3) A person who contravenes any of the provisions of subsection (1) or (2) commits an offence.

20. Control of dogs
(1) No person who owns or keeps a dog may
(a) permit a bitch on heat to be in a street or public place without supervision;
(b) urge a dog to attack, worry or frighten any person or animal unless in self-defence;
(c) keep a dog if the premises is not adequately fenced to keep such dog inside when it is not on a leash;
(d) or permit a dog
(i) to trespass on private property;
(ii) to constitute a hazard to traffic using any public road;
(iii) to constitute source of danger or injury to a person outside the premises on which such dog is kept;
(iv) or to be a source of danger to employees of the municipality entering such premises for the purpose of carrying out their duties. A notice to the effect that a dog is kept must be displayed in a conspicuous place.
(e) keep any dog which interferes materially with the comfort, convenience, peace or quiet of neighbours by
(i) barking, yelping, howling or whining;
(ii) charging any vehicles, animals, poultry, pigeons or persons outside any premises where it is kept;
(iii) or by behaving in any other manner.
(2) The municipality may seize and impound at a dog which is found in a street or public place in contravention with the provisions of this by-law.
(3) A dog impounded in terms of subsection (2) may be released to the owner upon payment of a fee determined by the municipality.
(4) A person who contravenes a provision of subsection (1) commits an offence.

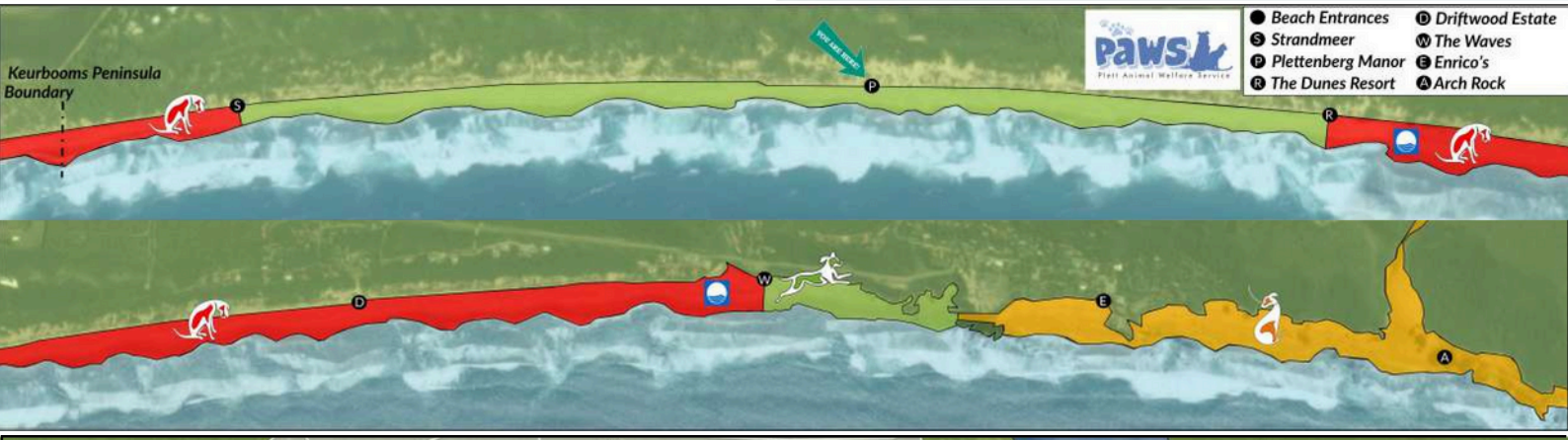
Bitou municipality
to be the best together


Beach Entrances
The Wreck Beach
Solar Beach
Sanctuary Beach
Robberg Beach
Beacon Island Resort
Central Beach
Plett Animal Welfare Service
YOU ARE HERE!


Your nearest dog friendly (green zone) and on-lead (orange zone) beaches are on Robberg (W) and Poortjies (E)
Beach Entrances
Beacon Island Resort
Central Beach
Hobie Beach
The Wedge Beach
Lookout Rocks Entrances
Plett Animal Welfare Service


Beach Entrances
Poortjies Beach
Milkwood Manor
Lookout Deck
Blue Flag Beach
Plett Animal Welfare Service


Beach Entrances
Keurbooms Lagoon Caravan Park
Goose Marsh
CapeNature Boundary
Your nearest dog friendly (green zone) and on-lead (orange zone) beaches are on Poortjies Beach (W) and Keurbooms Beach (E)
Plett Animal Welfare Service


Keurbooms Peninsula Boundary
Beach Entrances
Strandmeer
Plettenberg Manor
The Dunes Resort
Driftwood Estate
The Waves
Enrico's
Arch Rock
Plett Animal Welfare Service


Nature's Valley
ST. ANDREW'S AVENUE
ST. GEORGE'S AVENUE
ST. MICHAEL'S AVENUE
GROOT RIVER ESTUARY
TSITSIKAMMA SECTION OF THE GARDEN ROUTE NATIONAL PARK
Beach Entrances
Salt River Trail/ Blue Rocks
Nature's Valley Beach
Estuary Beach
Plett Animal Welfare Service

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