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The abalone or 'perlemoen' (Haliotis midae) is severely over-exploited because of poaching activities, but its depletion has encouraged aquaculture ventures to cultivate the species for the export market. The exquisitely beautiful juveniles illustrated here were reared from the microscopic larval stage in HIK Abalone Farm at Hermanus. Their two-tone colouration reflects the fact that they were first fed diatom films before being shifted onto an artificial diet of kelp and soya. Cultivated individuals grow far faster than those in the wild, which reach a shell width of 114 mm – at which size they may legally be harvested – after 13 years.

Photo and text: George Branch
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