Ref: 9/1/1-08-AENP

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Eastern Cape, South Africa

June / July 2008

About this newsletter

This is a general newsletter – sent out on a bimonthly basis - about the latest happenings and developments in the Addo Elephant National Park. Please see contact details at the end for further enquiries

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CAT CHRONICLES

Addo Elephant National Park's lion population has swelled by one following the birth of a cub, now about two months old, to Kamkwa, the oldest of the lionesses in the Park.

Kamkwa's new cub with big sister, Gina

The cub has been seen following its mother, usually accompanied by her first female offspring named Gina, in the area of the Park known as Wayne's Valley. A number of visitors, rangers and guides have reported sightings of the cub since it was about one month old. It is unusual that a lioness will allow her cub to accompany her from such a young age.

Ardlam's two cubs

The latest addition brings the number of lions in the Park to twelve: double the number of lions originally introduced to the Park.

The cubs of Ardlam – a male and a female - are now one and a half years old

The lions' fiercest competitors, spotted hyena, are also doing well in the Park, with numbers estimated at over 20. Eight spotted hyena were originally introduced to the Park in 2003 and 2004. Visitors have also spotted hyena and their cubs periodically, especially at a den site located in the area between Rooidam and Gwarrie Pan.

BUFFALO SOLD ON KIRKWOOD WILDLIFE AUCTION

Disease-free buffalo from Addo Elephant National Park once again received top prices on the Kirkwood Wildlife Auction, raising funds for the SANParks Park Development Fund, used to subsidise the expansion of national parks.

The auction, held on 28 June 2008 as part of the Kirkwood Wildlife Festival, saw buffalo reaching top prices of R180 000 per animal for a family group. The top price for a buffalo bull was R127 000. Four spotted hyena were sold on the auction at R5 600 per hyena. Red hartebeest, black wildebeest and eland from Mountain Zebra National Park were also sold on the auction. Over R3.36 million was raised in total.

White rhino from Kruger National Park were sold on catalogue with one of the rhino bulls generating a whopping R640 000.

CONSERVATION & TOURISM HIGHLIGHTS

Facts and figures excerpted from the Addo Elephant National Park's Report on the April – June period:

- Two new black rhino calves were recorded: one on a camera trap and one during an aerial census
- The Coast Care programme removed 2584kg of waste from the Sundays beach area
- 1 585 children and 108 adults participated in environmental education programmes in the Park
- The unit occupancy in Addo rest camp rose (compared to last year) by 1.1% to 84.8% while Matyholweni's occupancy rose by 5.6% to 47.3%. Camping occupancy rose by 5.6%
- The use of guided game drives (seats sold) rose by 6.7% compared to the same period last year
- There were 28 871 visitors to the Park from April to June, representing a drop of 4.6% compared to the same period in 2007. This is the result of the Easter weekend – a very popular holiday time - falling in March (whereas it was in April last year) as well as the effect of an increase in fuel costs
- Only 36 mm of rain was recorded in the Addo section of the Park, compared to the long term, average for April to June of 78.6 mm
- Four of the Park's staff received Long-term Service Awards: 25 years of service for both Ranger Sergeant Melvin Tambo and Field Ranger Gibson Tambo; 25 years for Trade/Admin Clerk Cheryl Momberg and 20 years for Hospitality Manager Dawid Momberg

BIRD ISLAND TRIP POSTPONED

Birders and nature lovers jumped at the opportunity to join a boat trip to Bird Island in Algoa Bay, home to the largest breeding colony of Cape gannets in the world, but had to put their excitement on hold when the trip was postponed due to very rough seas.

The trip, planned for 12 July, would have been the first time that a public group would visit the Island – which forms part of Addo Elephant National Park - for a guided tour of the bird colony. The new date for the trip has not yet been confirmed but will be weather dependent.

Bird Island is also home to an established population of African penguins which now enjoy conservation after previous years of persecution through egg-collecting and guano harvesting. Gannets, dependant on built-up mounds of guano for nesting sites, declined when guano collection was practiced but numbers have steadily increased since it ceased to reach about 160 000 pairs.

Bird Island is home to 160 000 Cape gannets

The rare and endangered roseate tern is a winter breeder on the island, along with huge winter roosts of Antarctic and common terns.

The neighbouring Seal Island houses South Africa's most easterly breeding colony of swift terns while Black Rocks is home to the most easterly Cape fur seal breeding colony, with a population of about 4 000 seals.

The boat trip to the islands will provide participants with an opportunity to view several pelagic sea bird visitors which may include various albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels, skuas and storm petrels. These birds do not roost on main land and spend most of their lives at sea. Other marine life such as whales, dolphins and sharks may also be spotted.

Near to Port Elizabeth, participants will stop to view St. Croix Island, home to a large colony of African penguins, as well as roseate terns and mixed flocks of Antarctic, common and swift terns.

Bird and St. Croix Islands were proclaimed part of Addo Elephant National Park in 2005, after the national park's expansion to the coast in 2002.

The birding adventure, hosted by the Addo Honorary Rangers and sponsored by Sasol and Glendower, departs from Port Elizabeth harbour for a full day.

FRONTIER REGION SCOOPS AWARD FOR SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

Lucius Moolman (centre) accepts the award from SANParks COO, Sydney Soundy (left) and the Miss Earth runner-up (right)

The Frontier Region received the award for Best Performing Region for a second year running at the annual South African National Parks Kudu Awards.

The Kudu Awards is an initiative that aims to reward stakeholders for their contributions and efforts in making South African National Parks the custodian of choice for protected areas.

Internal staff members are bestowed with "top achievers" awards, known as the Chief Executive Awards. This national award recognises their dedication and selfless efforts towards achieving the goals of the organisation from across 22 National Parks under SANParks management. The Chief Executive Awards are meant to encourage staff to do their work with 'pride and joy' and to always view this organisation as their personal business.

Best Performing Region

Addo Elephant National Park, Mountain Zebra National Park near Cradock, Karoo National Park near Beaufort West and Camdeboo National Park in Graaff-Reinet make up the four national parks of the Frontier Region.

The Region won the award for performing significantly well in the three core business areas of SANParks, namely Conservation, People & Conservation and Tourism, as well as for achieving excellent financial results and communications & marketing efforts.

Conservation achievements included the introduction of cheetahs, leopards and lions to Kuzuko Contractual Area in Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) as well as the introduction of critically endangered black rhino to both Addo and Karoo National Park (KrNP). Four cheetah were introduced to Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNP) and the Cape mountain zebra population grew to just over 500 individuals in KrNP, making this the biggest population of endangered Cape mountain zebra in South Africa in one protected area. AENP rangers (in conjunction with MCM) were instrumental in arresting eleven illegal divers in the Bird Island Marine Protected Area in January 2008. The sale of buffalo and antelope raised R3 240 600 for SANParks' Park Development Fund which is used to purchase new land for expanding national parks.

The Working for Water programme in the Parks cleared 20 734 hectares of land of invasive alien plants, achieving 130% more than target. The person days generated by expanded public works programmes in the Parks was 131 125 person days which was 55% more than target.

On the Tourism front, total visitors to the four national parks increased by 2.6%, from 250 230 in 2006/07 to 256 720 in 2007/08. Unit occupancy increased by 1%, from 76% in 2006/07 to 77% in 2007/08 and camping occupancy increased by 3.3%, from 66.8% in 2006/07 to 49.33% in 2007/08. The use of activities (such as guided game drives) increased by 4.5%, from 32 902 in 2006/07 to 34 384 in 2007/8. There was an increase of 45.45% in black visitors overnighting, from 1 081 in 2006/07 to 1 729 in 2007/08. AENP received a Professional Management Review Golden Award and Silver Award for Tourism.

The number of learners visiting the Parks increased from 21 201 in 2006/07 to 22 921 in 2007/08: an increase of 8.1%. MZNP increased Park Forum members from 10 members in 2006/07 to 21 members in 2007/08 and also increased the number of their Honorary Rangers from 3 to 11 members. KrNP's Manager, Mzwandile Mjadu, received the award for Best Constituency Builder due to efforts in building up positive relationships and partnerships with local government departments, NGO's and stakeholders.

Corporate Contribution to Conservation

SANParks honoured the efforts of Sue Downie and Lucky Mavradonis with a Kudu Award for Corporate Contribution to Conservation for their efforts dedicated to the cause of black rhino conservation. They have been particularly involved in monitoring black rhino in Addo Elephant National Park, as well as other national parks such as Mountain Zebra, Karoo and Augrabies Falls National Park.

Sue Downie and Lucky Mavradonis in field with field ranger Surprise Mlambo (centre)

With more than 30 years of voluntary involvement in conservation, Sue and Lucky are pharmacists by profession and have raised funds for various projects involving our National Parks. The most publicized effort, televised by 50/50, was the translocation of the black rhino cow, Shibula, from Lisbon Zoo in Portugal to Augrabies Falls National Park, for which the transportation costs were donated by Sue and Lucky from funds they had raised with the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

They have also raised funds for land purchases to expand Augrabies Falls National Park and Mountain Zebra National Park.

Aside from their financial contributions, Sue and Lucky have been personally involved in monitoring black rhino, which started with their monitoring of Shibula. Now, seven years later, they monitor black rhino across the National Parks and have just completed their 70th monitoring trip. This translated into the publication in 2007 of "Focus on Rhino", a summary of their monitoring expeditions. Recently retired from business, Sue and Lucky still continue their voluntary work towards the environment and conservation in South Africa.

Best Publication/Programme/Website

Local NGO, Ocean Messengers, headed by Rainier Schimpf, was awarded the Best Publication/Programme/Website award in the Environmental Media Contribution category for the production of a film which has brought to the fore the plight of the marine ecosystem and what this translates to for future growth of the country and its ecology.

Ocean Messengers was filmed in the waters of Algoa Bay. While this film reveals to all the ecological treasures hidden in the waters of Algoa Bay, it also highlights the negative impacts that industrial development will have on both the natural environment, and the profitability of industry in the area.

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SANPARKS WEEK

22 – 28 SEPTEMBER 2008

"Know Your National Parks"

Explore your Natural and Cultural Heritage

News from South African National Parks….

Camdeboo National Park Alleviates Poverty

The Camdeboo National Park surrounding the rural town of Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape is making a significant contribution to poverty alleviation and economic empowerment in the local community.

The Zebra Construction team building gabions in Camdeboo National Park

A considerable total of 21,229 person days of work has been completed through the People & Parks programme which is funded by Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism. In addition to this, the Working for Water programme, soon to be expanded in the Park, has contributed a further 1,270 person days to date.

"Job creation is a very important aspect of the benefits created by national parks and one which park management takes very seriously", said Timotheus Webb, Camdeboo National Park's Community Liaison Officer.

Four local SMME contractors have been created to tackle various projects within the Park. The labour component of these projects represents 33% of the contract values, totaling some R6.2 million. Each SMME is led by a contractor with a team of fourteen workers from the local community.

Springbok Contractors led by Jan Kane are engaged in a project to rehabilitate areas of the Park degraded by past overgrazing or developments such as old roads and buildings. This is achieved by planting spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*) cuttings which root easily and contribute significantly to carbon sequestration. Kane says his team has planted at least a hundred thousand of the plants since they commenced in September 2007 and would welcome any investment in the project by big business who would like to reduce their global warming debt.

Simon Ncenge of Buffalo Construction has led a project very successfully to rehabilitate the 4 650-hectare Winterhoek area which was recently incorporated into the Park. His team has demolished the unwanted infrastructure related to past farming enterprise such as fences, kraals, reservoirs and old buildings. J. Lomberg and Zebra Construction's project concentrates on combating soil erosion by rock-packing gullies and building gabion structures in deeply eroded gullies.

A fourth team, Springbok Construction, under the supervision of Sias Smith, focus on alien vegetation management by injecting invasive alien plants such as American aloe and prickly pear with appropriate herbicides. These plants pose a threat to biodiversity conservation and have an unfavourable visual impact on the landscape.

The Springbok Construction team has also recently undergone training by the SANParks' Table Mountain National Park project leader for trail development to equip them to construct a new trail in the Park.

Webb said that all four of these contractors comprise an efficient unit that could be used by private landowners to implement similar programs on their properties in developing private nature reserves and game ranches.

Honorary Rangers Contribute R12 Million to National Parks

From January 1 to December 31 last year, the Honorary Ranger's (HR) corps contributed more than R12 million to the coffers of SANParks. This is 11 percent more than 2006. About R4 million is made up of 'indirect' costs that are incurred when HRs stay in the parks while performing duties or working on projects. Janssen Davies, chairman of the HR, also highlighted other milestones for the year in his report presented at the annual general meeting (AGM) which was held at Berg-en-Dal in the Kruger National Park (KNP) on May 24, 2008.

"Mission accomplished," he said as he elaborated on the corps' performance balanced score card objectives. In total the HR exceeded all five their objectives. In 2007, the HRs achieved an 11,6 percent growth in membership and 25,5 percent in applicants.

This translates to a 15 percent growth in overall membership compared to the previous year. By December 2007, the corps had 565 HRs and 236 applicants - 801 members in 25 regions.

In December the corps had 124 previously disadvantaged (PDI) members, which is 15,4 percent more than in 2006.The junior rangers' corps increased its membership by 18,3 percent and had 1807 members at the end of the year.

The Camdeboo and Johannesburg South regions were inaugurated as new regions, as well as a virtual honorary rangers section for our forum members who wish to become HR's.

The AGM is part of a four day indaba that included guided bushwalks, rock painting excursions, attending a game capture, and Kruger's annual rangers' day. There were also a number of displays and exhibitions.

Another highlight was the annual Sasol wildlife quiz with teams from the HRs and SANParks competing for the floating trophy. Quiz master Quinton Coetzee guided the teams to a spirited end where the where the HR Louries team won the day for the HRs.

Flower Explosion at Namaqua National Park

Many environmentalists have described the Namaqualand wild flower season as one of the wonders of the world. All signs are that 2008 will provide yet another promising year to experience the exceptional namaqua flowers. Over the past weeks, Namaqua National Park has been the backdrop for a sudden outburst of flowers, particularly orange daisies and gazanias.

Namaqua flowers

These indigenous flowers are dormant during the dry period but burst into life after the first winter rains.

Other flowers starting to show are the Conicosia (varkiesknol) and Pelargoniums. The area around Soebatsfontein in Namaqua National Park has large patches of vygies which look even better than last year.

The nearby town of Kamieskroon also has an unbelievable show of flowers. Most roads in the area have been repaired after the heavy rains and are generally suitable for a sedan vehicle.

Enquiries:
Megan Taplin
Tel: +27 (0)42 233 8609
Email: addoenquiries@sanparks.org

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