

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Eastern Cape, South Africa

January/February 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

16 ILLEGAL DIVERS ARRESTED ON EVE OF ABALONE FISHERY CLOSURE AND DIVING BAN

On the eve of the closure of the wild abalone commercial fishery and the implementation of the diving ban, sixteen people involved in illegal diving in the Bird Island Marine Protected Area (MPA) were arrested on Wednesday 30 January, during collaborative compliance efforts between officials from the South African National Parks (SANParks) and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's (DEAT) marine and coastal management division.

Abalone shucking tools and diving equipment which include diving bottles and cylinders, snorkels and flippers were confiscated.

The incident followed after SANParks rangers noticed two super ducks around the MPA during a patrol in the area on SANParks 'Kadouw' vessel.

As the rangers gave chase DEAT's speed chase vessel, the Florence Mkhize was immediately dispatched to the area. The super ducks fled the area, abandoning their divers in the water. One super duck returned soon after in an attempt to retrieve the divers, but fled again after warning shots were fired into the air.



Addo Elephant National Park's Kadouw vessel



Bird (foreground) and Stag Islands

Upon the arrival of the Florence Mkhize, 12 divers were immediately arrested and taken to Port Elizabeth. A further four divers were taken to Port Elizabeth the following morning after weather conditions deteriorated making it difficult for one of the vessels to return to Port Elizabeth with the suspects the previous night..

Bird Island is part of Addo Elephant National Park and is home to the largest breeding colony of Cape gannets in the world. The waters around Bird Island were proclaimed as a Marine Protected Area in 2004.

SANPARKS AND EASTERN CAPE PARKS AGREE TO COLLABORATE ON CONSERVATION MATTERS

The Chief Executives of South African National Parks (SANParks) and Eastern Cape Parks signified their commitment to collaborate on conservation and tourism issues in a Technical Cooperation Agreement.

The agreement recognizes the two organisations' mutual interest both in protecting biodiversity and the environment and in managing and utilizing this biodiversity in a manner that will benefit present and future generations.

“We look forward to a fruitful cooperative governance partnership,” said Dr. David Mabunda, Chief Executive of SANParks.

Mabunda added that the challenge for SANParks and Eastern Cape Parks would be to continue the vital role of biodiversity conservation in a highly transformed landscape with a multitude of land-uses by using a holistic approach to management in terms of nurturing partnerships between organs of state and the private sector.

Nokulunga Maswana, Eastern Cape Parks’ Chief Executive Officer, emphasized the significance of the agreement and the fact that the two organisations are already enjoying a successful partnership.

Maswana added that it would be important to look at biodiversity conservation beyond the boundaries of parks and reserves in the future.



Nokulunga Maswana (left) and David Mabunda (right) sign the agreement

The partnership between the two organisations will cater for co-operation on various issues and projects including the translocation of wildlife, collaboration between specialized personnel such as veterinarians, eradication of invasive species and developing a common strategy towards 2010. The exchange of information will be promoted and strategies shared in terms of benchmarking and best practices. Biodiversity monitoring systems will be integrated and combined marketing and tourism initiatives developed.

The agreement was signed at Intsomi Forest Lodge in the Addo Elephant National Park on the 26th of February.

At the event, Addo Elephant National Park’s Manager, Norman Johnson, highlighted the significant contribution that the Park has made to the local economy. The Park currently attracts over 170 000 visitors a year. Over R143 million has been spent to date on poverty relief projects in the Park, with a further 51.9 million committed to these projects by 2010. The Park has employed 53 SMMEs with 769 workers from local communities within these projects.

SANParks manages 22 national parks across the country of which four – Addo Elephant, Mountain Zebra, Camdeboo and Tsitsikamma National Parks – are situated in the Eastern Cape. Eastern Cape Parks manages 21 nature reserves in the Eastern Cape region.

MOUNTAIN BIKE RACE HELD IN PARK FOR FIRST TIME



Cyclists await the start gun

The Mountain Bike Race of The Herald Cycle Tour was held in the Addo Elephant National Park for the first time ever this February.

460 contestants took part on the two routes of 42 km and 65 km which started and ended in the Park. The routes saw contestants slogging up the Zuurberg Pass into the pristine scenic beauty of the Zuurberg Mountains and then dropping down into the Sundays River Valley, winding through citrus farms.

Built between 1848 and 1858 by hundreds of convicts, the Zuurberg Pass was one of the only mountain passes in the country to not form part of a

mountain bike race route.

The race ended along a stretch of the predator-proof electric fence of the main game area of the Park, affording cyclists a chance of cycling a few metres away from some of the Park's wildlife.

The organizers say that they were taken by surprise with the amount of entries, which exceeded their expectations by at least 100 cyclists. They subscribe this to the attraction of the Addo Elephant National Park to cyclists and their families.

JEWELLERY PROJECT IN ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK PROMISES BRIGHT FUTURE FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

In a collaborative effort between the Port Elizabeth College, the Mining Qualifications Authority, PPC and the Sundays River Valley Municipality (SRVM), 40 creative young people are being trained in indigenous jewellery design in the Addo Elephant National Park.

The young people were selected from local communities surrounding the Park after a series of information-sharing sessions and interviews.

The learners receive training for four days of the week for a period of six months before they graduate from the project. All other needs are taken care of, from the provision of a jewellery-making toolbox, to all the raw materials required for training to meals and transport.

At the official launch of the project at the Addo Elephant National Park on 7 March, the Port Elizabeth College also announced that the learners will also receive a daily allowance during the training period.



Thembile Dlamini (centre, standing) admires jewellery made by some of the learners

At the launch, Local Economic Development Manager for the SRVM, Thembile Dlamini, said: "Programmes such as this one are important to minimize the existing lack of skills in these local communities."

Dlamini announced the municipality's commitment to helping develop the entrepreneurs who will graduate from this group of learners through actions such as developing business plans and engaging other development agencies.

"It is important to address poverty alleviation and skills development in the communities in this area", said Joy Grobler, Port Elizabeth College's Chief Executive Officer, explaining the motivation behind the College's development of the indigenous jewellery skills programme.



Alice Nkhodise (foreground) and Llewellyn Meek (background) try on jewellery pieces made by learners

The College has been running the skills programme since 2006 when the first programme was started up in the Hankey area. Learners who graduate successfully from the six-month programme have a chance of being chosen for the more advanced jewellery manufacturing programme.

Learners, who attend the programme in a hall in the Main Restcamp of Addo Elephant National Park are encouraged to use natural materials such as stones, seeds and wood in their jewellery work, along with the traditional beads and wire to

create unique pieces.

Part of the programme focuses on introducing the learners to jewellery buyers in the Port Elizabeth metropole with a view to setting up a customer base once the learners establish their own business.

Speaking at the launch event, Addo Elephant National Park's Manager, Norman Johnson, encouraged the learners to complete the programme successfully.

"Youth is the future", said Johnson.

NEW: Book and pay for your holiday online!

SANParks Real-Time Booking System Goes Live

This system enables you to register, browse availability, build an itinerary, pay for conservation fees and check out with your credit card. You will be sent a confirmation via email.

Visit www.sanparks.org/tourism/bookings/

News from South African National Parks...

SANParks Responds to Minister's Announcement on the Norms & Standards for Elephant Management

The Chief Executive of South African National Parks (SANParks), Dr David Mabunda, announced on the 25th of February, that SANParks welcomes the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, announcement of the Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in National Parks and other protected areas.

In February 2005 SANParks presented the Minister with a proposal for the management of elephant populations in National Parks, after much consultation with various stakeholders through The Great Elephant Indaba of 2004 and other fora. The proposal included park expansion, translocation, contraception and culling. The inclusion of culling as a management tool sparked some heated debate from mainly animal rights groupings, which has been going on since.

"The approval through the Norms and Standards for the full suite of management interventions means that SANParks will be able to draw on the most appropriate management interventions for prevailing circumstances", said Dr Mabunda.

"We want to also make it clear that the decision to use different management tools will not be made indiscriminately. Even a decision to cull is one that is to be made prudently in line with appropriate management decisions."

"Considering that management objectives and circumstances vary from park to park decisions on management interventions will differ accordingly. In the extreme cases, where culling may be considered as a management option, we will be guided by the provisions of the Park Management Plans. Because there has been no culling in all national parks since 1995, the decision to go ahead with culling will take time as sufficient time and consultation is necessary to prepare for such an operation, should the need arise."

The Minister announced the Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in National Parks and other protected areas on the 25th of February. The full announcement can be found on the DEAT website, www.deat.gov.za

First Cheetah Cubs Born in Mountain Zebra National Park

The first cheetah cubs ever have been sighted in Mountain Zebra National Park after cheetah were introduced to the Park in May 2007.



Park rangers first spotted four cubs, along with their two-year old mother, in January in the Kranskop area of the Park. These cubs were then estimated to be about 6 weeks old.

Days later, the rangers noted that another four cubs - of about 4 weeks old - had been born to the other female cheetah in the Park.

Two male and two female cheetah were released into the Park last year, becoming the first large predators to inhabit the Park since its proclamation in 1937 and fulfilling an important function in restoring the predator-prey balance, as well as enriching the biodiversity of the Park.



The female cheetah are sisters of two years old, a fairly young age for cheetahs to give birth. In an area inhabited by a larger population of cheetah, the breeding of young females such as these would have been suppressed by older females. Female cheetahs disperse after leaving their mothers, taking between one and one and a half years to settle in to new territories before breeding.

Cheetah cubs and their mother (top)

Although cheetah cubs do not generally have a very good survival rate, it is expected that most, if not all, of the Park's cubs will survive as they do not face a threat from other large predators.

The male cheetahs in Mountain Zebra National Park were sourced from the De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust, who relocated them from the north western Kalahari area. Males are specifically chosen from different geographical locations to ensure that they are unrelated and hence provide a larger gene pool.

Before relocation to the Park, the males were bonded into a coalition by slowly introducing them to each other over many months, first in adjoining camps and then in the same camp. Male coalition members bond for life.

Cheetah in Mountain Zebra National Park are monitored by means of radio tracking to enable rangers and researchers to study their patterns of movement and ensure that they acclimatise well to their new home.

Research focuses on the prey selection, habitat selection and feeding patterns of the cheetah, as well as the change in vigilance and behaviour of the antelope species they target.

Listed as "Vulnerable" on the IUCN's Red Data List, cheetah in national parks are managed as part of a metapopulation to ensure that genetic diversity is maximized, leading to a more robust population.

Cricket@Skukuza 2008

The beautiful Kruger landscape is home to an amazing array of fauna, flora, and, on occasion, cricketers! The cricket oval near Skukuza is a hidden gem, carefully maintained in amidst the Kruger bushveld. The players? An assorted bunch of Scientists, Rangers, Field Guides and community members from Skukuza, the Northern Region and the SANParks online forum, who will be playing cricket to raise funds for SANParks.



Skukuza, the Northern Region (Golden Gate Highlands, Marakele and Mapungubwe National Parks) and the SANParks Forum have put together cricket teams to play against each other at Skukuza on the 15 of March 2008. The cricket field in the Skukuza Staff Village has hosted some interesting games over the years and annually hosts a Cricket Clinic for all the local schools.

*Musketeers in Action. Pic courtesy of *Deville*

Last year, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park put together a cricket team and challenged the Skukuza cricket team to a match on the SANParks public forum. One thing led to another and it wasn't long before the SANParks forum members were putting together their own team and this annual tournament was born. The Angels (forum women's team) are eager to repeat the lesson they taught the Musketeers (forum men's team) in last year's match, when they won an overwhelming victory!

The more serious match will be the one between the Musketeers and the Skukuza men's team. Last year, Skukuza took home the floating trophy (kindly donated by forum member *Muhammad) after an entertaining match that saw both new and older talent from both teams fighting at the fore. A new regional team enters the fray this year, the Northern Devils (a women's team made up of players from the Northern Region), who will take on the Angels. Full details of the programme will be made available a week prior to the match, with matches to start at 08h00.

A reliable source informs us that the hippo will conduct the usual pitch inspection, and that the resident cheerleaders are almost guaranteed to be on the sidelines once again.

The SANParks online community has over 11 000 registered members, a number of whom have been involved in various events and activities revolving around SANParks, from 'forum meets' all over the world to fundraising adventures and various other projects online.



Resident cheerleaders at the Skukuza

This annual cricket tournament is a way to bring members together to celebrate this unique community and its relationship to SANParks, as well as to raise money for and awareness about important projects in KNP. Money will be raised by way of donations via the SANParks website in support of the SANParks Cybertracker Project.

The weekend is SANParks largest gathering of forum members, some of whom are traveling from as far as Holland and Canada to attend, and many of who have never met each other in the 'real world'.

*Please note that forum members names used refer to their on-line names

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