

MEDIA RELEASE - 3 October 2003

Lion released in Addo Elephant National Park

For the first time in over 100 years, six lions were re-introduced to the Addo Elephant National Park near Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape today. It will be first time since 1879 that these magnificent cats will roam this area again.

These lions, translocated from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, have spent over a month in two separate holding camps in the Addo Elephant National Park. For lions from the vast Kalahari area that may never have seen a fence before, this period in the holding camp surrounded by an electrified fence has been a learning period. The lions were selected from different prides in the Kalahari in order to maximise genetic diversity and thus also needed time to bond with each other.

The acclimatisation period has proved very successful so far, with the lions settling down, feeding together and generally interacting well.

The lions were separated into two groups – of one female and two males each – on opposite ends of the park to encourage them to form two separate prides. The ratio of males to females has deliberately been selected in order to minimise the breeding rate. Research has indicated that the game area of the Addo Elephant National Park can carry, at most, 20 lions.

Prior to their release on Saturday, the lions will be fitted with radio collars. This will allow their movements and behaviour to be monitored after release. It is hoped that the lions will concentrate on kudu, red hartebeest and warthog as their main prey species as populations of these herbivores are plentiful in the park.

The release of lions is the first step towards restoring the natural balance in the ecosystems in the park, allowing predators to control prey populations. The next step - planned for the first two weeks of October this year - will be the introduction of six spotted hyena.

For further information, contact:

Lucius Moolman
Park Manager
Addo Elephant National Park
Tel: (042) 233-0556
E-mail: luciusm@parks-sa.co.za

Megan Bradfield
Social Ecologist
Addo Elephant National Park
Tel: (042) 233-0556 or 083-650-8646
E-mail: meganb@parks-sa.co.za