

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Eastern Cape, South Africa

December 2010



About this newsletter

This is a general bimonthly newsletter 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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Photo: Johannes van Niekerk

NEW TENTED CAMP OPENS TODAY

Visitors to Addo Elephant National Park will be able to experience a new way of overnighting in the national park, when the Spekboom Tented Camp opens today.



The tented camp, which has been under construction for the past few months, consists of five fixed tents on decks with two beds each inside the Spekboom Hide in the Park's Main Game Area.

Visitors will be able to spend the night at a tent inside the hide, giving them the unique experience of listening to the sounds of the bush and being surrounded by wildlife, away from the popular, busy Main Camp. Visitors can also check the hide's waterhole for nocturnal wildlife.

Each tent, surrounded by thicket bush, has two beds, two camp chairs, a braai unit, a table and a solar-powered light. There are communal

showers and toilets as well as a wash-basin a short walk away from the tents.

Visitors staying in the tents can either bring all their own equipment or can hire a box of cutlery, crockery, cooking utensils and bedding. There is no electricity available at the tents and visitors are advised to bring their own torches.

Day visitors will still be able to access the Spekboom Hide on their game drive as usual. The Tented Camp has a separate entrance gate and is fenced off from the day visitors hide area.

The Spekboom Tented Camp units are available at R500 per night per tent (valid until 31 October 2011). Equipment & bedding is available for a R200 refundable deposit.

Bookings can be made through SANParks central reservations on reservations@sanparks.org or Tel: 041 582 2575 or online at www.sanparks.org



PENGUINS GET NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Forty-nine endangered African penguin juveniles were given a new lease of life yesterday when they were successfully released onto Bird Island following a rehabilitation process.

The juveniles were removed as chicks from Bird Island, which forms part of Addo Elephant National Park, in mid October when extreme cold, wet and windy weather threatened their survival. The harsh October weather event followed similar harsh weather conditions in June this year which caused the death of 1000 African penguins on Bird Island.



When extreme weather hit the island in October, South African National Parks (SANParks) flew the ailing penguin chicks off the island by helicopter to two rehabilitation centres for specialised care.

SANParks has also taken extra precautions in the meantime by providing artificial shelters for penguins and using material to drain nest sites to aid penguin chick survival.

33 penguin juveniles were successfully rehabilitated by Penguins Eastern Cape (PEC) in Cape St. Francis

and another fifteen were rehabilitated by the South African Marine Rehabilitation & Education Centre (SAMREC) in Port Elizabeth.

The penguins, now about three months old, were taken to Bird Island by SANParks' boat from Port Elizabeth Harbour early yesterday morning. After a three hour journey, they were released onto the slipway at Bird Island and soon joined the rest of the African penguin colony.



The juveniles are expected to do well as they are now able to forage for themselves. All released juveniles have been tagged and will be closely monitored by rangers on Bird Island to ensure they survive.

Meanwhile, care of the remaining penguin chicks at the rehabilitation centres continues with the aim of releasing them back into the wild in the future.

There are about 1500 African Penguins on Bird Island and about 2500 breeding pairs on St. Croix Island, home to the largest African Penguin breeding colony in the world.

ABALONE BUST AT BIRD ISLAND

In the early hours of 27 October, Addo Elephant National Park Rangers arrested a diver in possession of abalone in the early hours of this morning.



The diver was arrested after he surfaced from diving at 00h29 with 107 shucked abalone in his possession.

Rangers stationed on Bird Island noticed a light shining near Black Rocks while on their nightly patrol and after observing the situation for a while, launched a boat to investigate.

After they shot off a warning flare, the rangers noticed two super-ducks in the water with a number of divers on board. The two vessels with divers fled.

On patrolling the waters, rangers saw divers' torch lights shining in the water and approached the divers.

The two divers then proceeded to load the abalone and a cell phone used for communications onto the Park's vessel, mistaking the Park's vessel for their own.

One diver was arrested while the other managed to escape by diving back into the water and swimming away. Rangers confiscated the abalone as well as diving gear and detained the diver on Bird Island. The suspect will be taken to Kinkelbos police station to be charged and the case is still pending.

Bird Island in Algoa Bay, home to the largest breeding colony of Cape gannets and a sizeable African penguin colony, forms part of the Addo Elephant National Park. It is flanked by Black Rocks which is home to the most easterly breeding colony of Cape fur seals as well as Seal Island and Stag Island.

ADDO LIONS FIND NEW HOME IN KAROO

Eight lions from Addo Elephant National Park became the first wild, free-ranging lions in the Great Karoo when they were released from the boma in Karoo National Park on 10 November.

The two male lions, two lionesses and four cubs filled the gap left by megapredators for the first time after an absence of almost 170 years from the area.



According to historical records, the last wild lion was shot at the nearby settlement of Leeu-Gamka in 1842. Historical evidence of lion occurrence in the area includes farm and river names based on the word "leeu" or lion and the fact that the two main rivers draining the central karoo mountains – the Leeurivier and Gamka River – derive from the Afrikaans and San words for lion respectively.

The lions were translocated from Addo Elephant National Park in late September, where the establishment of a lion population has been very successful following their introduction in 2003. The eight lions spent time in the Karoo National Park bomas to

allow them to acclimatise to the new surroundings before their release.

There are still 12 lions in the Main Game and Colchester Areas of Addo Elephant National Park and another two male lions in the Kuzuko Contractual Area of the Park. Most of Addo's lions are usually

seen between Carols Rest and Domkrag while one of the male lions frequents the area between Rooidam and Hapoor. Another lioness and her two cubs who have moved down to the Colchester area and are mostly seen around the Mbotyi Loop.

The Addo lions were originally introduced from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park stock, chosen for its genetic similarity to the Cape lions which would historically have occurred in the area and for their disease-free status. Lions can suffer from diseases such as tuberculosis and *feline immunodeficiency virus* (FIV) which can be transmitted to other species.

South African National Parks (SANParks) took the decision to introduce lions to the Karoo National Park in a bid to restore the natural functioning of the predator-prey balance in the ecosystem as well as to ensure that all historically-occurring species are once again conserved in the Park.



It is expected that the lions will prey mainly on the larger herbivores of the Park including gemsbok, which number over 1500 animals, red hartebeest (1400 animals) and eland (about 400 animals) as well as kudu (700 animals) and ostrich (600 birds).

Apart from their biodiversity value, the introduction of lions will have great tourism value for the Karoo National Park and for the Great Karoo Region. Visitors will now be able to experience both the unique atmosphere and tranquillity of the Karoo as well as the thrill of spotting lions in the wild.

Prior to the release of the lions, the restcamp area, reception complex, camping ground, swimming pool and popular fossil trail have been fenced in with low-level electrified fencing. This will ensure that visitors can walk between accommodation and facilities. Visitors will still be able to experience the Park on foot as hiking trails such as the Pointer and Bossie Trails will be run as guided hikes, at no extra cost, departing at various times of the day.

Predator-proof fencing was completed around the 176-kilometre perimeter of the almost 90 000 hectare-Karoo National Park to minimise the risk of lions exiting the Park onto neighbouring properties.

SANParks will initially monitor the lions closely with the aid of tracking collars fitted before the release to check what habitats the lions use, what prey species they target as well as to record their movements.

Karoo National Park is situated off the N1 highway just outside the town of Beaufort West.

WILDLIFE MOVEMENTS IN COLCHESTER

For the first time in the history of the Park, two sections of the Park were amalgamated when fences were dropped between the Addo Main Game Area and Colchester Area on 19 August.



It is with great interest that Park staff and visitors alike have been watching the movements of wildlife into the Colchester area since the opening.

Movements of elephants have been particularly interesting, since the opening of the fence has allowed them to return to the same land on which the original small group of remaining Addo elephants had sheltered before proclamation of the Park in 1931.

A few days after the opening of the fence, a number of elephant bulls moved over into the Colchester area,

relishing the new habitat and the prickly pears. Elephants are known to feed on prickly pears, so much so that control of the invasive prickly pear in the Park is very limited as elephants can be relied on to eradicate the plant.

Since the opening many elephant bulls have moved into Colchester and back again to the Main Game Area, while it was only in early November that the first family herd (elephants cows and calves) moved into the new area. Since then, another family herd has also moved across. These family groups do move between the two areas and are not resident in one area.



Another exciting sighting was recorded on a camera trap (fixed camera with sensor, which takes a photo when an animal moves past it) in the Colchester area: an adult male leopard. The same leopard was observed by visitors about a week and a half ago on the Mbabala Loop in the Main Game Area.

A large herd of buffalo as well as a large eland herd has moved across from the Main game Area to Colchester. Buffalo, zebra, antelope species (red hartebeest and eland) and ostrich were introduced to the Colchester area before the opening of the fence.

BIG TUSKER DIES

Rangers recently found the skeleton and tusks of an elephant bull and after a bit of investigation and checking with the elephant researchers, realised it was the remains of Gaatjies.

Gaatjies was the oldest elephant bull in the park (born 1954) and one of the biggest Addo tuskers. He was the most dominant bull in the Park for over 20 years and would therefore be the father of many of the younger elephants in the Park today.

It is believed that Gaatjies (named after the small holes in his ear flaps which helped to identify him, "gaatjies" means small holes in Afrikaans language) died of natural causes (old age).



MY ADDO PHOTO COMPETITION WINNERS

The "My Addo" photographic competition drew to a close with hundreds on entries received. The competition, organized by the Honorary Rangers: Addo Region together with the Weekend Post and



Katz Camera World, aimed to raise awareness about the bio- diversity within the Addo Elephant National Park.

The competition judges, Barrie Wilkins and Jill Sneesby had an extremely difficult task in choosing a winner from the more than five hundred and fifty entries received. Eventually they had to settle for three in each category although there were many that were of an equal standard. The public were invited to make their choice and a popular choice in each category will

also receive a prize if it didn't feature in the judge's choice.

The competition was a great success with more than R14 000 being raised for Addo's anti-poaching efforts. The winners will receive in excess of R30 000 in Katz vouchers and there will be a lucky draw for a weekend for two at the luxury Kuzuko Lodge which will take place at the prize giving.

The winning images are as follows:

Student Category 1st Lindsay Basson - Lions Sparring, 2nd Nicolous Regnart - Elephant, 3rd Shelby Gunn - Butterfly, Commended; Wilmari Humphris

Open Category 1st Janine Snyman - Baby Elephant, 2nd Lindie van Tonder - Tortoise, 3rd Bradley van Tonder - Blue Cranes, Commended; Lee-Anne Kemsley, Lorna Murphy, Suzanne Louw, Tania Gun, Popular choice; Suzanne Louw - Caracal



SLR Category 1st Richard Marsh - Elephant Interaction, 2nd Rainer Schimpf - Dolphin Pod, 3rd Matthys Ravensburg - Hoepoe, Commended; Richard Marsh - Elephant Silhouette, Matthys Ravensburg - Meer cats, George Whittal - Elephant drinking, Craig Chambers - Muddy Elephant, Rainer Schimpf - Great White, Michael Price - Weaver, Popular Choice; Duncan Noakes - Heron with Rat

2010 - 2011 AENP DIARY

13 DEC 2010	SPEKBOOM TENTED CAMP OPENS
5 JAN 2011	HERALD VW MOUNTAIN BIKE CHALLENGE Zuurberg Area
12 MAR 2011	ADDO ELEPHANT 50MILER TRAIL RUN Zuurberg Area
4- 6 JUNE 2011	KIRKWOOD WILDLIFE FESTIVAL & AUCTION in Kirkwood
1-3 JULY 2011	KIRKWOOD WILDLIFE FESTIVAL & GAME AUCTION
SEPTEMBER 2011	EDEN TO ADDO MEGAHIKE
SEPTEMBER 2011	SA NATIONAL PARKS WEEK free entry for SA resident day visitors
OCTOBER 2011	ADDO BIRDING WEEKEND
NOVEMBER 2011	MONDI ADDO MOUNTAIN BIKE CHALLENGE Zuurberg Area
EVERY DAY	MAIN GATE OPEN FROM 07H00 - 19H00
	MATYHOLWENI GATE OPEN 07H00 - 17H00
	GAME AREA GATE OPEN ACCORDING TO SEASON (please check times)
	PICNIC SITE IN GAME AREA OPEN 08H00 - 16H00

INDIAN NAVY VISITS ADDO

Almost one thousand members of the Indian Navy visited Addo Elephant National Park in September, while they were in Port Elizabeth for a joint training exercise with the South African Navy. They really enjoyed their game drive in the Park and were lucky enough to have good sightings of elephants and other wildlife.



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