This year’s Regional Achievement Awards evening in the Frontier was a huge success. A total of 91 nominations were submitted from staff for who they thought were deserving colleagues, a marked increase from last year’s 58.

The annual, prestigious event recognises and celebrates extraordinary, hardworking colleagues from throughout the region. The glitzy event was hosted at the Africanos Country Estate near Addo Elephant National Park, with about 90 staff members in attendance.

We were blessed to have had SANParks’ Managing Executive: Parks, Property Mokeona in attendance. Addressing the colleagues, he said “You are the examples of the quality of staff we have working in our national parks.

Your dedication, passion and loyalty is evident in everything you do and we hope that receiving these awards tonight will go a long way in not only motivating you to carry on in this fashion, but also see your colleagues striving for better. I, along with your Regional Manager and other top management in the region, am very proud of all the winners this evening, as well as all the other staff members who were nominated”.

The Wilderness section of Garden Route National Park walked away with the night’s most prestigious award – Best Performing Park, while Mountain Zebra won in the Best Performing Camp category. Karoo National Park scooped both the Best Performing Gate and Reception awards. A total of 24 individuals and teams received recognition for their hard work and dedication over the 2018/19 financial year. CONGRATULATIONS to all of them. More photographs of the various winners on pages 5 and 6.
Compliments

Addo Elephant
- My family and I have spent three days visiting the Park and we have loved every minute.
- Today we met a fellow colleague of yours, Simnikiwe Nogaya. He guided us around the Park so expertly and we enjoyed his company immensely!

Garden Route
- Just love, love, love this place!! (Wilderness).

Karoo
- We camped there on the way back to Gauteng. One night became three ...
- Fantastic place to stay.
- Definitely worth your while.

Mountain Zebra
- What a magical Park. We are sure we'll be back. Staff are friendly and helpful, chalets fantastic and well-equipped, beautiful vistas and the animals.

WALOW Programme: Game Capture

It's not every day a 16-year-old gets to witness the capturing of wild animals and holding bomas for them being erected in a national park. But that's exactly what a group of ten high school learners from Michausdal Senior Secondary School in Cradock got to experience recently.

They were participating in South African National Parks’ Walk and Learn on the Wildside (WALOW) programme, hosted by Mountain Zebra National Park. This was the second time the Park’s People and Conservation department participated in the national programme. The primary beneficiaries are Grade 10 and 11 learners who are interested in careers in Conservation, Eco-tourism and Hospitality.

The learners were ecstatic as they learnt all about how the SANParks game capture unit operates – from erecting the boma’s all the way through to capturing the animals.

One of the learners, Nomonde Phike, said “This was a great wildlife experience that taught us a lot about the different careers in the Park. We always thought that the only career in the Park was tourism but today we learnt that there are many careers one can follow in Mountain Zebra National Park.”

Brown hyena sighting in Camdeboo National Park

Camera traps have revealed the first photographic evidence of brown hyena (Parahyaena brunnea) in Camdeboo National Park outside Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape.

The cameras were put up by SnapshotSafari South Africa. SnapshotSafari is an international camera trap survey in southern and eastern Africa that looks to citizen scientists from around the world to identify wildlife caught on camera. Not only one, but two cameras have revealed evidence of what is believed to be the same animal.

Brown hyena are solitary and nocturnal, lying during the day in thick bush or in deserted burrows. Brown hyena live in small clans ranging from a breeding pair and their young to groups of several mature males and females. It makes sense, then, that both photographs were recorded after dark in April - 2 April at 9:11PM and again just over a week later on 10 April at 2:13AM.

This is a first for the Park. Although they occur close by in Mountain Zebra National Park near Cradock, brown hyena have not been seen in Camdeboo National Park before.

The photographic evidence has those knowledgeable in the field excited. Dr Katy Williams of the Brown Hyena Working Group, the University of Mpumalanga and Durham University in England and Dr Andrew Jacobson, who is collating data for range mapping of all Hyaenidae in preparation for a new Red list and Action plan, are reeling with excitement about the news.

Brown hyena is a near-threatened species. They are carnivores which have adapted to a scavenging lifestyle – feeding on carcasses of large herbivores killed by other animals. They will, however, also supplement their diets with insects, birds’ eggs, wild fruit and even occasionally kill small animals.

You can read more about the Snapshot Safari project on their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/SnapshotSouthAfrica/. They also have a Citizen Science Project where the public can log onto their website to view sightings and assist with identification or just have a look for interest: https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/shuebner729/snapshot-camdeboo

Take a Girl Child to Work Day - Karoo National Park

Karoo National Park’s People and Conservation Department hosted nine learners from three secondary schools in Beaufort West on its first ever Take a Girl Child to Work Day programme on 22 July.

The participating schools were Bastiaanse Secondary School, Beaufort West Secondary School and KwaMandlenkosi Secondary School.

After a short introduction to the Park, the girls were given “goody bags” and placed in different departments throughout the Park. Here their job shadowing gave them valuable insights into what happens in the different units and how they contribute towards the running of the Park.

It certainly was not a day of “All work and no play”, though. The group were taken on a short game drive to explore and enjoy the beauty of the Karoo before they headed home for the day.
Mandela Day Celebrations in the Parks

Mandela Day was widely celebrated in our national parks this year. In commemoration of Nelson Mandela’s 67 years of fighting for social justice, people are urged to spend 67 minutes or more on 18 July doing good for someone else. The parks definitely stepped up to the challenge and helped out in their nearby communities.

Staff at Addo handed out toiletry packs in the community of Colchester near Camp Matyholweni, while 25 households in the neighbouring Nomathamsanqa location benefited from linen from the Park.

Camdeboo and its Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP) staff arranged a Mandela Day rally which saw them helping out at various centres throughout the town of Graaff-Reinet - SPCA, Margery Parks Hospital, Vuyani Safe Haven, Adendorf Primary, Nomazamo Pre-school, Nqeweba Secondary and various play parks.

Tsitsikamma staff focused on refurbishish two creches - one in Mandela Park and another in Storms River. In addition, they also worked with the Koukamma Municipality to make a playground for local kids by clearing and cleaning the area. Knysna teams painted a créche and planted trees at two others - one in Bongani and the other in Diepwalle.

Wilderness staff went to Rhenendal Primary School to work on the school’s food garden which is part of the school’s feeding scheme. The teams also packed 1 000 nutrition packs to be distributed to the most impoverished areas in George. Those staff members stationed in Beervlei revived the area by painting and cleaning the Sonnerbloem Creche. Staff at Wilderness’ Ebb & Flow Rest Camp, including the Park’s technical team, marine and lakes rangers went to Carpe Diem, an organisation for people who are physically challenged, where they revamped the play area and worked in the garden to beautify the area. Staff in Farleigh painted the Redland Primary School.

In Mountain Zebra, staff members headed out in the early morning hours of the day to visit centres in Cradock, namely Hillside, Lingelihle and Michaudal. The first team headed to the Kwakhanya White Door Centre for women and children who are victims of abuse. While on the other side of the road another team was busy assisting the Lingelihle Old Aged Home by cleaning the yard and donating old linen, towels and appliances. The day ended with a soup kitchen on the streets of Cradock, handing out soup, pap and roasted bread to the community in need.

Addo Marine Protected Area official

The Addo Elephant National Park Marine Protected Area (MPA) officially came into effect on 1 August. It is one of three new MPAs within South African National Parks (SANParks) which were gazetted by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) on 23 May 2019. The other two are the Robben Island MPA (to be managed by Table Mountain National Park) and the Namaqua National Park MPA, which form part of 20 new national MPAs. This declaration was the culmination of many years of work by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), SANParks, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and DEA.

An MPA is an area of coastline or ocean that is specifically protected for the benefit of people and nature. They help manage part of the marine environment to rebuild fisheries populations, keep marine ecosystems working properly and protect the range of species living there. MPAs are divided into controlled and restricted zones to allow for both protection and use of resources.

The 1 127km2 Addo MPA protects a wide range of ecosystems, including sandy beaches, rocky shores, reefs, an estuary and islands. The protection of the estuary and reefs are important for the recovery of valuable fisheries resources such as abalone and kob. It also protects important feeding areas for the 9 000 pairs of endangered African penguins breeding at St Croix Island and the 60 000 pairs of endangered Cape gannets breeding at Bird Island. Located close to the city of Port Elizabeth, the MPA will facilitate nature-based tourism and serve as an outdoor classroom for educational activities.

This new network of MPAs increases the conservation footprint of South Africa’s oceans from 0.43 to five percent and is a major achievement for conservation. The planning towards some of these MPAs started as far back as in 2006, such as the Addo Elephant National Park MPA, by SANParks and the SANBI Offshore MPA project. Hundreds of planning and stakeholder meetings and negotiations with communities and industries such as oil and gas, mining, fisheries and aquaculture took place. Planners and lawyers spent five years developing the shape, size and regulations for these MPAs with many compromises on all sides.

In Karoo, the BSP Office and People and Conservation hosted stakeholders such as the Department of Labour, SEDA, ABET and EMS to educate and upskill the BSP teams. The aim of the day was to workshop the participants on the various job and business opportunities and how to adequately compile their documentation/applications for possible opportunities.
Young Suray protects indigenous plants

There is a strong climber taking over indigenous plants. Its origin can be traced to South American countries including Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and others. According to the Agriculture Research Council (ARC), its stems outgrow the canopy of indigenous plants and spreads over their ground as well. This throttles the invaded plant from all necessities including light, nutrients and prevents further germination of seeds. Madeira Vine was categorised as a 1b alien invader and can be seen from Wilderness to Port Elizabeth.

It has fleshy, heart-shaped green leaves and spikes of white flowers (February to April). It produces multiple aerial tubers along the stems and each one of these is capable of starting a new plant. SANParks’ Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP) has prioritised the eradication of the plant and committed resources to do this inside Garden Route National Park and surrounds.

Newly-appointed Project Manager for the Working for the Coast programme, Suray Makwena whose job it has been to identify the plant in its infant stage, says it can grow up to 30m when it has developed. Younger stems look like reddish or greenish ropes and later turn greyish-brown.

At the age of 31, she’s dedicated more than 10 years in efforts to protect indigenous plants and ecosystems against alien invasive plants like Madeira Vine. Her career began with working for a BSP contractor in 2008 and as soon as there was an opening in 2009, she grabbed it to work as a General Administrator for the Project Manager. “This was a great foot in the door for me. As a General Administrator I had an overview of the programme,” Suray says.

In 2011, she applied for an Administrator Assistant position within the same programme which meant working in and out of office (in the field). In 2017 she became a Shadow Project Manager which allowed her to stand in for the Project Manager in his absence.

In 2018 Suray became the Project Manager for the Working for the Coast programme. Her passion and drive for her work makes it easy for her to manage 74 people who work in her project area. Its jurisdiction stretches over 63 kilometres from Harolds Bay to include Victoria Bay, Pakalsdorp and Lientjiesklip to Swartvlei in Sedgefield.

Asked about the mammoth task of managing such a taxing project, she says the solution is striking a healthy balance between work and play. “As a single mom, I’m fortunate to have a supportive team and a supportive manager. I also learnt earlier on that as a young person in the workplace, I have to always up my game. So when I joined the programme, I took every opportunity to learn and went on virtually every in-service training opportunity presented to me,” she says.

Frontier receives tourism safety monitors

Parks such as Camdeboo and Garden Route have taken on new Tourism Safety Monitors in a programme funded by the National Department of Tourism. Their primary task is to ensure the safety of visitors and the access of information to visitors.

The programme was launched in 2017 by the Department of Tourism in Soweto. Park Manager for the Garden Route National Park, Paddy Gordon says it is one way of preparing young people for the job market straight after school.

There are a few of these Programmes within SANParks and include the employment of young people as Environmental Monitors and also within Biodiversity Social Programmes.

Some of their responsibilities include:

- Tourism management (Customer service)
- Tourism operations (Chalets and facilities)
- Visitor information and guidance
- Crime prevention activities
- Crime response
- Compliance regulation (littering, dogs, bicycles, noise, alcohol)
- Life-saving skills and first aid
- Research support (crime statistics, tourism, environmental requirements)
- Control of invasive species (reporting where extensive, removing where a minor presence is visible)
Regional Achievement Award Winners

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Chad Nelson (Addo Elephant National Park)

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Sorina van der Walt (Karoo National Park)

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Mauricha Meshaka (Tsitsikamma section)

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Marionette Scholtz (Knysna Regional Office)
(accpected on her behalf by Park Manager, Paddy Gordon)

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Mauricha Meshaka (Tsitsikamma section)

Excellent Performance in the Workplace
Mauricha Meshaka (Tsitsikamma section)

Best Customer Service
Hesron Ruiters (Tsitsikamma section)

Best Customer Service
Jeanie Botha (Mountain Zebra National Park)

The Shield
Jonathan Britton (Wilderness section)

Best Leadership
Masindi Raselabe (Mountain Zebra National Park)

Best Constituency Builder
Karoo National Park People and Conservation

Best Ranger Post
Addo Main Camp Rangers

Best Performing Business Unit
Karoo National Park Human Resources and Administration
(accepted on their behalf by Park Manager, Nico van der Walt)

Best Performing Business Unit
Mountain Zebra National Park Guided Activities
Regional Achievement Award Winners

Regional Manager's Award
Alban Booysen
Charlene Bissett
Fayroush Ludick
Maretha Alant
Nwabisani "Korsten" Hendricks
Sinor Witbooi

Special Team Effort
Wilderness Fire Management Team
Karel Maswati and Wilfred Oraai
(Knysna section of Garden Route National Park)

Congratulations to all the winners!