EIGHT DAYS OF FREE ENTRY INTO NATIONAL PARKS

South African National Parks (SANParks) has heeded the request from South Africans who aren’t able to visit national parks during the week, to include weekends. This year’s 14th annual SA National Parks Week takes place from Sunday 8 to Sunday 15 September – once again in conjunction with our partners Total South Africa and FNB. National parks focus week is a worldwide campaign which gives people free day access to national parks. This annual event gives all South African citizens the opportunity to visit one of the national parks for free.

In what is known as the Frontier Region of SANParks, this applies to Addo Elephant National Park (outside Port Elizabeth), Camdeboo National Park (on the borders of Graaff-Reinet), Garden Route National Park (with its Tsitsikamma, Knysna and Wilderness sections), Karoo National Park (outside Beaufort West) and Mountain Zebra National Park (near Cradock). Due to the popularity of Addo Elephant National Park and its proximity to Port Elizabeth, gate quotas of 700 people per day per gate over weekends will apply – so it is advisable that visitors get there early to avoid disappointment.

Each year SANParks aims to increase the number of citizens that are granted free access to national parks during this time. Since we started the programme in 2006, a total of 430 361 South Africans have been afforded the opportunity to enter national parks and we want to see these numbers grow.

“It’s important for South Africans to visit and know the importance of national parks. They act as spaces to practice sustainable conservation, as spaces that preserve and celebrate our culture and heritage, and we now see national parks playing the critical role of empowering communities living adjacent to parks through job creation and we continue to explore ways of creating business opportunities particularly for small business owners,” says SANParks Chief Executive Officer, Fundisile Mketeni.

Mketeni highlights the growing need for national parks to be relevant, particularly to young people and communities living adjacent to parks. “Through our Socio-Economic Transformation programmes and our Expanded Public Works Programme, we work closely with communities living adjacent to national parks with the aim of strengthening our relationships with them, in order to be more inclusive so we can tackle issues of wildlife crime with their help, afford them more access to parks for cultural use, inform young people about the different career options that parks have to offer and create job opportunities. SANParks hopes to strengthen and enable those communities to reap the benefits of the national parks.”

Visit a national park this year for free during SA National Parks Week, to see what it has to offer and do your part by getting to know your national parks, celebrate your rich heritage offering and experience first-hand the iconic beauty and plethora of natural flora and fauna.
Compliments

Addo Elephant
- Wonderful work by SANParks.
- Amazing, positive work! Well done, SANParks!
- Well done Rangers on amazing dedication to our wild animals.

Garden Route
- Awesome place. (Wilderness National Park)
- Fantastic work.
- Liesl Wagner helped me when I got sick on the hike. Thank you Liesl.
- Well done Eugenia, you are doing great work in Tsitsikamma.
- Thanks to all the Rangers for the amazing work you do with looking after our forests and educating people about our national parks. Well done.

Karoo
- One of my favourite campsites - love the setting, the atmosphere and the camp is spotless.
- We acknowledge and thank all the dedicated staff of the Park as we celebrate International Rangers Day to acknowledge them!
- Amazing staff.
- Thank you for your dedication.

Mountain Zebra
- We were super lucky to see a kill on the cheetah tracking yesterday, guided by the fabulous Des. Thanks so much for a great stay too.
- Lovely venue. Great breakfast on Sunday mornings!
- My friend and I did cheetah tracking in 2017. Magnificent memories from a trip that was full of wonder. Thank you!
- Looking good. Fantastic Park.

Birding Weekend at Mountain Zebra National Park

Mountain Zebra National Park’s Birding Weekend takes place between 1-3 November 2019 at a cost of R500 per person.

Scour the mountains and plateaus for larks, pipits and mountain birds and the plains for secretary birds, korhaan and bustard, while eagles, kites and kestrels soar overhead.

The weekend promises to be an unforgettable birding experience, including team events and exciting prizes. For more information, contact Willem on 083 703 5218 or email hr.mtzebra@gmail.com.

Addo Honorary Rangers keeping busy

The SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Addo region wishes to thank MSD Animal Health in Port Elizabeth for their generous donation of a year’s supply of Bravecto chew tablets to control ticks and lice on all five of the K-9 dogs at Addo.

Hans von Gordon secured the sponsorship and Tessa Machtle handed over the tablets to the two dog handlers at Addo main camp. Eastern Cape Medical Rescue donated eight first aid kits to the rangers. Since the rangers operate mostly in the veld and may be far away from any immediate medical assistance, the first aid kits will come in very handy.

The Honorary Rangers have also been hard at work over the past two months upgrading the K-9 unit enclosure for our most precious dogs. Glendore Sand and Stone donated cement, sand, stone and labour to build a cement slab around the enclosure. Talisman Hire donated the necessary equipment. A shaded area was erected by members with the shade cloth donated by Madiba Bay Shades.

We wish to thank all the sponsors for their contributions towards these projects.

Camdeboo staff open their hearts

Camdeboo National Park staff came to the aid of a family who lost everything they owned when their house burnt down in Geluksdal in Graaff-Reinet last month.

The Parks Vuyo Mbulawa, says “We as Camdeboo employees were touched by the story of Beledine Babbers and her three kids whose house burned and were left with nothing. We went to our respective homes and searched in our cupboards for items that we could contribute to them and came up with a few items.”

Some of the items they managed to hand over to her included blankets, duvets, curtains, crockery, clothing, toiletries and food.

“Although it is not enough, we thought it would definitely make a difference,” says Vuyo. Beledine, along with her children aged 11, 14 and 18 are now temporarily staying with a friend opposite the road from their house.
Women’s Month Celebrations in the Parks

This year’s Women’s month was well celebrated throughout the region.

The Garden Route ladies held a Women’s Day event which focused on mental health. In addition to this, the women were taught how to give massages and practiced on each other. Human Capital Manager, Marionette Scholtz, recognised outstanding work between 2017-2019 and awarded certificates to deserving candidates.

Meanwhile in Mountain Zebra, the Park Manager organised a Women’s Day treat at the nearby Buffelshoek Dirosie Lodge, for all the women working inside the Park. The fairer sex from Karoo National Park went out for supper at the local Spur to celebrate Women’s Day.

Wilderness Wellness Programme pays off

This year’s Men’s health programme in Wilderness focused on mental and physical well-being. Occupational therapist, Charlotte Marais discussed various mental illnesses, the symptoms and how to deal with it. Personal trainers spoke about the importance of exercising on a regular basis and gave demonstrations. Quinton Solomons was the lucky winner of a one month gym voucher. Wilbrun Arries, Charlton Veldman and Hendrik Davidson were the lucky winners of healthy goodie bags.
Creating vulture safe zones in the Karoo

As the world readies to celebrate International Vulture Awareness Day on Saturday 7 September, a long-term project will kick off which will ultimately see the establishment of a massive vulture safe zone in the Central Karoo. The project, to be run by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), initially kicked off in May last year in conjunction with South African National Parks (Karoo National Park). The Camdeboo Conservancy landowners were the first to initiate the idea to bring vultures back to the Karoo many years ago and was picked up by the Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Protected Environment (MZCPE) last year, which has since also brought the SANParks Honorary Rangers and Birdlife SA on board.

In October 2017, an international multi-species action plan was devised to start looking at various ways of actioning the conservation of vultures across 127 different countries. Vulture safe zones were identified as one of the most effective ways to tackle this dynamic landscape. It allows environmentalists to focus on an area, identify what the threats are and implement spatially explicit conservation interventions to get rid of the issues on the landscape and protect areas that are core to vultures.

Dr Gareth Tate from the EWT’s Birds of Prey Programme headlined a special presentation on Vulture Safe Zones in Graaff-Reinet on Wednesday 14 August. “Our objective is to protect breeding pairs, as they are the currency of the population. Luckily, 62% of them can be found in protected areas such as national parks,” said Tate.

Phase one of the project will involve finding synergy between farmers’ agricultural practices and conservation. It will entail direct engagement with landowners in the MZCPE, of which there are 64 so far. We will identify what threats occur on the landscape which are preventing vultures from establishing populations there,” he continued.

Classified on the IUCN’s Red Data List of Threatened Species as critically endangered or endangered, he said there is a great need to talk about this underappreciated group of animals, who perform one of the most important ecosystem services. “We are experiencing an African vulture crisis. We need to apply conservation efforts and prioritise the conservation of these very important birds. There has been a rapid population decline, with some populations having declined by up to 80% over the past 20 years,” he said.

These threats, he expanded on, are habitat loss, unsafe reservoirs (drowning), electrical infrastructure (collisions and electrocutions) and poisoning (directly for body parts for use in traditional medicine or indirectly through lead poisoning or scavenging off carcasses which have been poisoned, etc). Poisoning in various forms have been responsible for 91% of vulture mortalities over the past few years.

Tate says Phase two, anticipated to kick off in 2021, will be informed by the first phase and will involve the active mitigation of the identified threats.

World Ranger Day in the Parks

World Ranger Day on 31 July was an absolute blast this year. The annually celebrated day honours our rangers in the Parks who are crucial in the fight for conservation.

They are often in the forefront against poaching and work long hours out in the bush. Thus it was fitting that the rangers celebrated Ranger Day out of their natural habitat.

Mountain Zebra National Park's rangers had a team building outing to Tsitsikamma. Great fun and camaraderie was had by the Ranger team.

Meanwhile, in the Knysna section, the Honorary Rangers and Park staff gathered at the jetty boardroom for prayer, speeches and videos aimed at celebrating and inspiring rangers in the work they do.

Later the group visited the Charlesford farm which was sponsored to them for half a day to canoe/kayak, braai and have fun. The SANParks Honorary Rangers and the farm owners sponsored rolls, soft drinks, foot long cheese grillers and dessert.

The group enjoyed being outdoors at a location outside the Park. The staff from Diepwalle and Harkerville forests were thrilled as they hardly get to canoe/kayak in their terrestrial sections.

Thank you to all who contributed towards the day's festivities and a huge thank you to all our rangers in our Parks.
Stop Violence against Women!
#riseupforwomen
#AmlNext?

An injury to one is an injury to all!
#riseupforwomen
#AmlNext?