It’s been a while since three furry little creatures caused as much hype and made national news, but Addo Elephant National Park’s lion cubs proved they were extraordinary by surviving on their own without mom, Gina, for weeks.

It’s suspected Gina died of a snake bit, orphaning the three. It also appears as if the other lioness, Josie, took them in and cared for them until she had cubs of her own. The siblings were last photographed by a guest in mid-December – looking terribly thin and withered. Posted on Facebook, the pics garnered widespread interest and concern, which saw people coming into the Park specifically to look for the trio and offering their services in the search for them. Local and national print and broadcast media also closely followed developments, appealing to visitors and prospective visitors to report any sightings to the Park’s conservation staff.

A number of leads were received, which saw dedicated staff follow up on each one in the hope of finding the youngsters alive. Conservation Manager, John Adendorff, even spent time in the air conducting aerial searches for the siblings. Days of searching yielded no results, and the search was eventually called off early in the new year. Adendorff predicted they wouldn’t have been able to survive and fend for themselves for longer than four weeks. Staff and friends of the Park were devastated.

But on the afternoon of Saturday 10 January, a new spark was lit when a Gorah guide alerted rangers that he may have spotted the three. Although sceptical, they still went out and miraculously found them – albeit severely malnourished and lethargic. News of their survival travelled fast, as good news does, and turned what was a bleak start to the new year into one with renewed hope.

The cubs were darted and placed in a boma, where they received immediate medical attention.

Now about nine months old, the one male (Samson) and two females (Lara and Shireen), will spend the next few months in a camp to grow and perfect their hunting skills, before they’re ready to be set free in a larger area. Their futures will only be decided then – whether or not to keep them in Main Camp, move them to another section of Addo or relocate them to another park.

Addo’s little survivors!
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
- “The beauty of the Park is overwhelming and even more the lengths your staff go to to make us feel welcome. I have never seen so much professionalism behind a SANParks desk as with the lad at your check-in point. With a beautiful smile he welcomed us and with so much grace and confidence explained the camp to us, making sure that we know where everything is.”
- “I am writing to give my thanks to Edward in Addo Elephant National Park. We stopped at Jack’s picnic site for a break and I accidentally locked my car key in the trunk. Edward warmly helped us phone the locksmith and he stayed with us until the problem was solved. We are very grateful for his help. I thank you for your good management and help from your good staff.”

Camdeboo National Park
- “Lovely camp site! We really enjoyed our stay.”
- “The lady at Reception was efficient – she provided all the information even before we asked, and very friendly and helpful. Wonderful to arrive like that after a long drive!”

Karoo National Park
- “I want to thank and compliment the Karoo staff. I forgot my shaving bag at a chalet. I phoned them and they kept it with ‘lost and found’. I arranged a courier to collect and received all in good order. Thank you for this. Something we don’t find every day.”
- “This Park works like clockwork. Everything is in perfect working order.”
- “Our guide, Gregory was fabulous. His knowledge, passion and understanding of the Karoo was incredible. Gregory and the driver were very friendly and made us laugh throughout both the morning and evening drives.”

Mountain Zebra National Park
- “A very pleasurable experience. Clean, well-run Park. Staff very friendly and efficient.”
- “The Reception staff went out of their way to make us feel that we were VIP’s.”
- “The accommodation was excellent. The chalet was well equipped and linen beautiful. Very impressive.”
- “I was very impressed with management and the facilities in general. I will definitely go back. I will highly recommend this Park. A true reflection of quality and care. True ambassadors for South Africa. Well done!”
- “Your night game drive was superb and Dan (our guide) was fantastic! We also had a picnic in your rest camp, which was in immaculate condition! We thank you for that. To top off our weekend, we saw your two lion!”
- “The staff at Reception and in the Restaurant were exceptional. They were constantly friendly and happy. We were most impressed. They shared duties and always did it with a smile. It really made one want to continue staying. Well done on their professional behavior.”

Oom Daniel: A painter’s dream subject
Karoo’s retired gate guard, Daniel Hollander, seems to be a hit with artists. He received a second portrait painting of himself from a guest in January.

KwaZulu-Natal painter, Esme Potgieter, was so impressed with Oom Daniel’s friendliness and professionalism when she and her husband visited the Park last year that she took a photograph of him at the main gate. She says they considered him the ideal ambassador for both the Park and the organisation, and she couldn’t help but capture his spirit in an oil painting. Esme visited the Park again in January, and wanted to hand over the painting to Oom Dan personally, not knowing that he had retired in November. After speaking to Park Manager, Nico van der Walt about her intentions, Nico went into the nearby town of Beaufort West to collect Daniel and brought him in to accept the gift in person.

To say that Oom Daniel was taken aback and humbled by the gesture would be an understatement. He was practically speechless, but did express that such recognition means more to him than what money could ever buy.

Many years ago Oom Dan was also depicted in a water painting by another guest who donated it to the Park, and which was handed to him as a farewell gift when he retired last year.

Veterinary Wildlife Services’ stalwart for January
General Manager of Veterinary Wildlife Services, Dr Markus Hofmeyr, was the unit’s stalwart for the month of January for a most heroic act in Mountain Zebra National Park.

While monitoring one of the Park’s sub-adult cheetahs, he realised that its heart rate was shallow and that its heart stopped for about ten seconds. Markus immediately performed CPR and resuscitated the cheetah and then carried her down the mountain to the Park’s boma.

Well done, Markus!
Thank you Cape Union Mart!

Karoo National Park staff would like to thank Cape Union Mart and Professor Paul van Helden from Cape Town for a number of donations over the past few months. Some of the items had minor faults which staff repaired and then put to good use in the veld like in the bush camp from where trackers monitor game. Pictured here are rangers with some of the equipment which Prof van Helden has arranged in the past, such as mattresses, jackets and raincoats, footwear, torches and headlights, utensils and water bottles. The latest donation consisted of 54 pairs of boots and sneakers, which were disturbed among the rangers and staff in other departments.

Recovered cycads replanted

Forty-four cycads removed from a neighbouring property near the town of Jansenville in the Eastern Cape, have been chipped and replanted in Addo Elephant National Park. The cycads measure between 3 and 4.5m and are estimated to be between 500 and 1 000 years old. An aerial census of the area revealed that a further 51 had been uprooted and left behind, and these will be replanted where they originally stood.

Four suspected smugglers were arrested by the Jansenville SAPS on their way to Gauteng during February. They are being investigated for ties to a South African syndicate that specialises in trading in cycads. The bust has been described as the largest of its kind in the Eastern Cape.

The Parks’ Honorary Rangers have been instrumental in providing both monetary and physical support – having provided an initial sum of R100 000 towards the costly care, chipping and replanting process. They furthermore embarked on a donation drive, requesting the public’s assistance in the effort to save the cycads:

BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS:

SANParks Honorary Rangers
Nedbank
Branch Code: 158 550
Account No: 1585 392 448
Account Type: Current
Reference: Cycads
The Honorary Rangers of Mountain Zebra National Park host a Christmas party for the staff’s children every year. Last year was no different, but they came in with an extra surprise this time round: they had a playground installed in the staff village!

Santa himself handed each child’s Christmas gifts over to them from the HR’s, which included stationery and books, balls and other toys as well as toiletries. Ice-cream, cooldrinks and other nutritious foods were also on offer on the day. In return, the youngsters demonstrated their singing, poetry and dramatisation skills for all to enjoy.

The children have been without swings and a see-saw for a long time as the ones which were there were old and damaged. Their excitement couldn’t be contained, and they started playing on them as soon as they were installed. It is said children learn through play, and this playground will also go a long way in developing their social skills, foster good self-esteem and lead to healthy development.

The Park’s staff and children are extremely thankful to the Honorary Rangers for their generous donations.

Karoo National Park and Working for Ecosystems, in conjunction with the Departments of Health and Social Development celebrated World AIDS Day in the Park on 1 December.

Guest speakers motivated the audience to know their HIV status in order to stop the spread of the virus. The day also provided an opportunity for free, voluntary testing.

Camdeboo National Park’s now well-known Valley by Moonlight event certainly kept guests entertained during early March. Not even the preceding cold and wet weather kept the enthusiasts away. A total of 21 people participated. Everyone met up at the new viewing deck at the Valley parking area in the early evening, welcomed with a magnificent view of a double rainbow as the sun set. And, when the cloud cover started clearing, the night sky lit up with a magnificent full moon – casting more than adequate light on the deck for everyone to enjoy a great braai surrounded by good company and the cool night air.