The Department of Environmental Affairs in collaboration with South African National Parks (SANParks) celebrated World Ranger Day in Addo Elephant National Park last month.

Deputy Minister Barbara Thomson delivered the commemorative message highlighting the dedication and commitment of South Africa’s rangers as well as the importance of the World Ranger Day. World Ranger Day is observed on the 31st of July each year. It is the day to commemorate the many rangers killed or injured in the line of duty. It is also the day to celebrate the work they do to protect the world’s natural and cultural treasures.

This year SANParks showcased the work done by marine rangers in our national parks at the Darlington Dam section of Addo Elephant National Park, highlighting how marine and terrestrial rangers work together to protect our natural heritage. South Africa is battling the threat against its wildlife on so many fronts and elephant and rhino are not the only animals at risk of being poached. Species such as abalone are illegally harvested and sea turtles are snared, while illegal fishing and dumping of waste into the oceans is rife. Sharks are caught for their fins, while whales and other ocean species are dying because of over-fishing and the amount of plastic and other waste dumped in our oceans.

As a result, much of the Ranger Corps’ duties are being focused on anti-poaching operations. SANParks rangers undergo extensive training supported by canine units, small aircraft, as well as sophisticated technology as part of their anti-poaching operations, said Deputy Minister Thomson.

“Our rangers are facing daily hardships in their efforts to protect many of our species, such as the elephant, rhino, cycad, pangolin and abalone from poachers. Our country’s natural heritage derived from our enormous biodiversity is a key income generator for tourism and thus an important contributor to our economy through job creation and tourism,” added Deputy Minister Thomson.

The minister also thanked SANParks for its significant role in providing the rangers with necessary support in terms of specialised training and equipment to enable them to respond effectively to incidents. However, if it was not for these excellent women and men who daily risk their lives to protect species in our country, many would face extinction, she added.

She expressed her sadness and condemned the killing of rangers, particularly in the Kruger National Park (KNP), which is mostly the target of poaching activities. “I would like to pay a special tribute to our departed rangers for dedicating their lives while protecting our wildlife. In the past weekend, Respect Mathebula, field ranger based in KNP was shot and killed while on a counter-poaching operation.”

As part of World Ranger Day activities, 28 elephants were moved from the main Addo game viewing area to roam in the Darlington section of the park. By expanding the range of the elephant the pressure on the environment and on the herds roaming in the Addo region will be alleviated. It is thanks to the sponsorship by Network for Animals that this first group of elephants comprising of three family groups was relocated to this recently-fenced area.

In conclusion, Thomson thanked SANParks Honorary Rangers for offering their time to contribute to conservation and the elimination of wildlife crimes. “These volunteers do not get paid for the work they do assisting rangers out in the field. They volunteer their free time and resources out of their sheer love of conservation. Let us follow their example by committing ourselves to working together to protect our wonderful world.”
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
- We stayed at Kabouga Cottage and it was great. Neat, clean, tidy and comfortable. All staff encountered were friendly, well informed and helpful.
- Big thanks to all. A great time indeed.
- The staff everywhere were super and very welcoming, especially the wonderful Blackie Albaster at Nyathi. He goes out of his way for the guests. Our birthday dinner at the Castle Baron restaurant was again brilliant – both food and service, for which I went back the next day to mention to the manager.
- Hope to see you soon and again thank you from all of us.

Camdeboo National Park
- Stunning... loved our time there...

Garden Route National Park – Storms River Mouth
- In response to the Red Route cycling trails being opened after the Knysna Fire.
- Thanks for looking after the forest so well. Grateful it is (slowly but surely) opening for the public again.
- Well done SANParks - can't wait to return to those beautiful trails!

Karoo National Park
- We returned from what was an amazing trip to the Embizweni hut.
  - It was an incredible experience. The hut was more than we ever expected. Besides its location, what it had and how it was stocked was amazing and the little touches like the towels and the "flowers" on the towels, showed so much care goes into the unit and still make it so special. We will definitely be back and are already telling close friends to go and experience it.
- We stayed at Afsaal Cottage. Clean, neat, tidy and well equipped. The solitude there was something special. A great time was had and memories made.
- Thanks to all the friendly staff.
- Wonderful hospitality and warmth has been our experience at this beautiful Park in the middle of the Karoo. Woke up to lion roars this morning, snow-capped mountains and golden sunshine, then delicious breakfast served by the friendliest staff. A great start to our winter holiday! Thank you to all concerned!

Mountain Zebra National Park
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Sales at the annual Kirkwood Wildsfees Game Auction on Friday 29 June exceeded expectations in a very depressed market. These included buffalo from Addo Elephant and Camdeboo National Parks and Cape mountain zebra from Mountain Zebra National Park.

Auction convener, Johan Swart, says sales totalled R4.6-million, down from the R7.5m turnover in 2017. All the SANParks game were sold.

“The top price was R130 000 for a buffalo bull from Camdeboo, with an Addo cow selling for R60 000 to a local breeder. A kudu bull with horns estimated at 54 inches went under the hammer for R60 000,” Swart said. All 70 of the genetically tested Cape mountain zebra were sold.

Swart said the biggest problem facing game farmers in the Eastern Cape is the ongoing drought, and most are keeping stock levels to a minimum in order to reduce feeding costs as the veld is largely depleted.

“Given the uncertainty in the market due to the drought and other factors we are very happy with the result,” Swart said.

Mandela Day was widely celebrated in our parks this year, the centenary of the global icon, Nelson Mandela. Mandela Day’s (18 July) purpose is to pay it forward by donating time or resources to those in need. Addo Elephant National Park made a difference in their neighbouring communities by donating usable linen and crockery to Huis Welverdiend, an old age home in Jansenville near the Darlington section of the Park. The Mayibuye Ndlouv Development Trust donated kitchen utensils for an aftercare centre that caters for the aged and orphans in Enon Bershoba. Clothes were also donated by the Park’s staff.

Meanwhile, in Karoo National Park, children from the staff village were taken out on a game drive and given a snack pack. Camdeboo National Park staff attended the 100 Men March as well as helped clean up the community. Students from Mountain Zebra National Park took the initiative to visit the Amy Bell Children’s Centre to provide snacks and toys. They also spent their time playing with the children. BSP teams under the guidance of the project manager and Mountain Zebra staff assisted a man aged 60 whose leg was amputated by painting and cleaning his house and outside yard that was in a very bad condition.

And over in Garden Route National Park, Knysna area staff together with Knysna Animal Welfare Society painted the quarantine area which is demarcated for strays and injured animals. Other teams in Knysna partnered with the local ward councillor and planted the Eyeshot Créche in White Location. The Wilderness Area team focused on several areas: a team was sent to George to assist CANSA with basic maintenance of wendy houses and to plant indigenous plants for care homes. Another team, together with the Social Development Department, cleaned the premises of the Golden Oldies Service Centre and donated fleece blankets. Similar maintenance events took place in Beervlei (Lancewood Primary), Farleigh (Karateka Primary) and Goudveld (Keurhoek Community Créche).

Tsitsikamma teams partnered with Mountain to Ocean and Working on Fire and planted indigenous trees at the Woodlands Primary School. They also headed to The Crags/Kurland Village (Preschool) close to Natures Valley. All of the Mandela Day efforts were organised by staff members within the Parks. Thank you to all for going above and beyond your 67 minutes.

Frontier Region partakes in the 100 year celebration of Tata Madiba

All SANParks game sold at Kirkwood Wildsfees Auction
Youth caught hunting in Camdeboo National Park sentenced

A minor has been sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for illegally hunting in Camdeboo National Park.

The incident took place in October last year when he was found in possession of an animal trap and the carcass of an African civet. He was charged on four counts, namely (1) Entering a National Park without permission, (2) Hunting by means of prohibited ways, (3) Hunting/ removing carcass without landowner’s permission and (4) Illegal possession of wild animal or carcass thereof.

The accused was sentenced on Count 1 in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 to pay a fine of R1 000 or undergo six months’ imprisonment. On counts 2, 3 and 4, he was sentenced in terms of the Nature and Environmental Conservation Ordinance to pay a fine of R2 000 or undergo 12 months’ imprisonment. He could not pay the fines, and as such will serve a one year sentence as the two sentences will run concurrently.

Park Manager, Mzwandile Mjadu says “It is illegal to hunt in a National Park, whether the animals are an endangered species or not. We thank the SAPS for their speedy work as well as the judicial system for sentencing accordingly. Camdeboo National Park is plagued by illegal hunting due to our location – practically surrounding the town of Graaff-Reinet. We hope the court’s ruling sends a strong message to others that swift and stern action will be taken if caught”.

Popular Red Route cycling trail reopened in Harkerville

The Harkerville team reopened their world-famous Red Route cycling trail on the 20th July, the first day of the Krynsia Oyster Festival. Speaking on site, Area Manager for the Krynsia section of the Garden Route National Park, Megan Taplin said her section had received numerous requests from cyclists to reopen parts of the trail affected by the June 2017 wild fires.

The Red Mountain biking route coastal section through the fynbos area is now open offering cyclists scenic views of the Indian Ocean. Vegetation has recovered and the topsoil is much more stable.

Section Ranger for Harkerville, Nico Oosthuizen, said: “The Red Route was tested by some of the local and regular cyclists who were very pleased with the maintenance work done. Those areas include tracks burnt during the Krynsia fires.” Although the route is open, continuous assessment and maintenance will continue, mainly due to the sensitivity of the topsoil in some areas.

The Kranshoek hiking trail remains closed after an assessment on the vegetation of the trail by independent hikers and assessors indicated it still needs time to recover.

One of the assessors, Di Turner from Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers said the trail must be open again soon as it combines four vegetation types - Afro-temperate forests, Fynbos, Noetzie Thicket and Strandveld, making it a microcosm of the Southern Cape habitat types. “The views of the rugged and beautiful coastline are unparalleled. It is absolutely crucial that it is opened again as soon as possible. It is an incredible drawcard for international tourists and locals alike. At best, it is a strenuous and difficult hike and should be open to the fitter and more experienced hikers.”

Red-billed oxpeckers flourish in the Karoo

It has been nearly eight years since the reintroduction of red-billed oxpeckers to Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNP) outside Cradock – and all indications are that the project by the Park’s Honorary Rangers is a success.

A group of 40 red-billed oxpeckers were flown into the Park from Kruger National Park in August 2010. The birds spent one week in an aviary to acclimatise to the local conditions before being gradually released with the hope that they would settle in and breed.

The current success is measured in the number of juveniles reported as well as regular reports of sightings of oxpeckers on their land by farmers in the area. Red-billed oxpeckers have very recently been spotted by various bird watchers and farmers as far afield as the Graaff-Reinet area. It is highly possible that these may be from the MZNP core group.

Red-billed oxpeckers feed on ticks and blood-sucking flies and can be spotted on game such as zebra, buffalo, kudu as well as domestic animals like cattle and horses. They were exterminated in the Eastern Cape in the early 1900s, largely due to the practice of dipping livestock with toxic chemicals. They are highly sensitive to organophosphates - any of several organic compounds containing phosphorus, some of which are used as fertilisers and pesticides. Products that contain organophosphates should thus be avoided in areas that are known to be inhabited by oxpeckers.

Oxpeckers were successfully introduced to other conservation areas in the past, including Addo Elephant National Park near Port Elizabeth.

For the first time since the introduction in 2010, research will be undertaken by the Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Protected Environment (MZCPE) Project together with Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and other interested parties. They will focus their efforts in the areas in and around Cradock and Graaff-Reinet, initially looking at monitoring/sightings of birds, awareness and information and reinvestigating the possibility of a similar reintroduction on the Graaff-Reinet side of the MZCPE.

For more information on oxpecker-friendly products or to report sightings of the birds, please contact MZCPE Environmental Ecologist, Maryke Stern on Maryke.stern@sanparks.org or 083 336 3066.
**Addo’s Similo April**, also known as ‘Oom Johnson’, has been a field ranger for SANParks for the past 17 years and retired at the end of June 2018. Similo did tremendous work in rhino conservation efforts and his expertise will be missed by his colleagues. All of the best Similo and enjoy your retirement. Similo is pictured on the left of the photograph.

**Happy Retirement**

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**Knysna’s water playground - the Knysna estuary**

The Knysna Oyster Festival presented a great opportunity to escalate awareness about the Knysna estuary, Knysna’s main playground on the water. Of the 249 national estuaries forming part of a study conducted by Jane Turpie and Barry Clarke (2007), the Knysna estuary was ranked above the St Lucia World Heritage Site in terms of biodiversity significance. This was determined by the number of its fish species, bird and botanical data. The estuary is home to 43% of South Africa’s plant and animal life and supports rare fish species such as the greater, white steenbras, dusky cob and Cape stumpnose.

Kyle Smith, SANParks marine ecologist, says “Estuaries are important nursery areas for juveniles, whilst adults also spend time in the estuaries feeding.”

They are under a range of pressures including changes to water inflow, pollution (plastics and fertilizer) which can impact the health of the estuary’s habitat quality and its suitability for fish and bait species.

“The Knysna estuary is also South Africa’s most important seagrass site with an estimated 355–430 hectares of Cape dwarf-eelgrass (Mairea, 2000; Bandeira and Gell, 2003; CES, 2009). Both the Cape dwarf-eelgrass (Short et al., 2007, 2011) and the fauna that it supports in Knysna are of very high conservation importance (Hodgson and Allanson, 2000; Russell et al., 2009), contributing to the estuary receiving the highest ranking in terms of its ecological importance.”

Some challenges include:

- More work to ensure pollution stays away from the estuaries and the ocean.
- While the work of the Knysna Pollution Action Plan carries on every week assessing all sources of pollution and any incidents that may negatively impact the bacteriological quality of the water, more must still be done.
- More educational initiatives and a shared environmental education plan with resources.
- More research projects are required to understand all aspects of the Knysna estuary which is the world’s one and only estuarine Hope Spot (conservation, tourism, skills, socio-economic) declared by Dr. Sylvia Earle in 2015.

Big events held in the Park during the Knysna Oyster Festival included the Knysna Cycle Tour, the Knysna Marathon, the Houtkapper trail run (Goudveld), the lagoon swim and others.

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**New Marketing Officer for Frontier Region**

We welcome our new Marketing Officer - Yoliswa Matwa - to the Frontier Region. She started in the Port Elizabeth Regional office in July and we wish her all of the best.
World Ranger Day and elephant translocation