Staff members from Addo Elephant National Park and the Wilderness section of Garden Route National Park walked away with Chief Executive awards from this year’s annual Kudu Awards evening held in Gauteng on 16 November.

A team consisting of rangers and conservation support staff from Addo took home the Special Team Effort award for the South Africa to Chad Rhino translocation project earlier this year. Staff from Marakele National Park, Veterinary Wildlife Services and Communications also formed part of the winning team. The translocation was made possible by the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Government of Chad, SANParks and the African Parks Foundation. The six rhinos originally came from Marekele National Park. They were then moved to Addo where they were in the care of rangers for nearly four months before their big move to the Zakouma National Park in Chad in May. The team was represented at the Kudu Awards by rangers Gibson Thambo and Kenneth Jewell.

The region’s other award on the night was for the Best Performing Gate, which went to the Wilderness section of Garden Route National Park. Gavin Fredericks and Anthony Innes received the award on behalf of the team. A number of criteria are considered when awarding in this category, namely general impression of the gate and surrounds, friendliness and efficiency of staff, administrative work, staff appearance and service to customers.

The prestigious Kudu Awards celebrates and recognises conservationists both within SANParks and externally. The gala event is hosted in partnership with First National Bank and Total South Africa.

This year the event took place at the Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand. The more than 300 guests were welcomed with a seamless drill demonstration by rangers from Golden Gate National Park as well as an inspirational video montage of SANParks employees from across the national parks expressing their take on the tagline “I am SANParks”. A moving tribute to the late Minister of Environmental Affairs, Dr Edna Molewa was played, depicting her love for conservation. The keynote address was delivered by the Acting Minister of Environmental Affairs, Mr Derek Hanekom, with messages of support from sponsors Total South Africa and FNB.
SANParks loses one more life after Beervlei fire

South African National Parks earlier this week announced the tragic death of Sandra Davidson, wife of employee, Hendrik Davidson. Her body was badly burnt during the Garden Route fires last month. We are saddened at losing Sandra. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Davidson family during this trying time. Our team will continue to provide the necessary support to the family and all affected people.

This is our last edition of Frontier Times for the year – one which is packed with news of the latest happenings in our region. The festive season has well and truly kicked in – it surely is as busy as ever at this time of year.

Should you be travelling over the next few weeks, please be safe on the roads. If you’re visiting one of our national parks, my wish is that you will enjoy it and create lasting memories with those around you. I trust that the staff remaining behind, forging time with their loved ones, will continue to look after you to the best of their abilities. To these same staff, I thank you for the sacrifices you make during this time of year and am sure that once the rest of us return to work in the new year, you’ll enjoy some well-deserved rest and relaxation.

Festive greetings to one and all. May it be a joyous time with your nearest and dearest.

Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
• We were camping in Addo. The tents’ ablations are spotless.
• Awesome and please keep up the great work guys and gals!
• I go camping there every year with 14 school kids and the camp grounds are spotless, with the men’s ablution block in good shape. Going back again soon! We love the amazing kitchen facilities.

Camdeboo National Park
• Lovely campsite. Beautiful place. So enjoyed our time there earlier this year.

Garden Route National Park
• So worth a visit!
• Thank you again to everyone who fought the fires.

Karoo National Park
• Wonderful service. Professional, friendly and efficient staff. The chalets are in mint condition with super clean bedding and towels. The Karoo National Park is a wonderful, positive advertisement for SANParks.
• Die huisie waarin ons gebly het, was onberispelik. By ontbyt het die vriendelikheid, hartlikheid en diens my voete onder my uitgeslaan. Ons het so iets nog nie tevore beleef nie en die res van hierdie vakansie ners nie. Regtig ek kan nie ophou om daai span mense te prys nie. My vriendelikheid, hartlikheid en diens my voete onder my uitgeslaan. Ons het so iets nog nie tevore beleef nie en die res van hierdie vakansie ners nie. Regtig ek kan nie ophou om daai span mense te prys nie. My vriendelikheid, hartlikheid en diens my voete onder my uitgeslaan. Ons het so iets nog nie tevore beleef nie en die res van hierdie vakansie ners nie. Regtig ek kan nie ophou om daai span mense te prys nie. My vriendelikheid, hartlikheid en diens my voete onder my uitgeslaan. Ons het so iets nog nie tevore beleef nie en die res van hierdie vakansie ners nie. Regtig ek kan nie ophou om daai span mense te prys nie. My vriendelikheid, hartlikheid en diens my voete onder my uitgeslaan. Ons het so iets nog nie tevore beleef nie en die res van hierdie vakansie ners nie. Regtig ek kan nie ophou om daai span mense te prys nie. My
dankie dat julle altyd ons naam so hoog hou.

• The house where we stayed was spotless. At breakfast the friendly, heartfelt and service my feet under my boot. We have never experienced such before and the rest of this vacation none of. Really, I just can’t stop to praise such a team of people. My friendliness, heartfeltness and service my feet under my boot. We have never experienced such before and the rest of this vacation none of. Really, I just can’t stop to praise such a team of people. My friendliness, heartfeltness and service my feet under my boot. We have never experienced such before and the rest of this vacation none of. Really, I just can’t stop to praise such a team of people. My friendliness, heartfeltness and service my feet under my boot. We have never experienced such before and the rest of this vacation none of. Really, I just can’t stop to praise such a team of people. My friendliness, heartfeltness and service my feet under my boot. We have never experienced such before and the rest of this vacation none of. Really, I just can’t stop to praise such a team of people. My
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Mountain Zebra National Park
• Love this Park. Whatever you do, make sure to include the cheetah tracking. Wonderful experience!
• It is not often you leave a Park and say that you have seen just about everything. We spent five nights in Mountain Zebra National Park and had the most amazing sightings. Our highlights were seeing lion and a cheetah mom and cub three times, including on a springbok kill.

SANParks and the Kruger National Park lost one more life at Beervlei fire

Sandra Davidson, wife of Hendrik Davidson, an employee at the Garden Route National Park, died as a result of the fires that swept through the area last month. The fires have claimed the lives of at least 13 people so far, including Davidson. The cause of her death is currently under investigation.

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The 2018 Addo Marine Symposium was hosted by SANParks: Park Planning and Development at Addo Elephant National Park’s Interpretive Centre on 25 October. This workshop, which is held every two years, provides an essential opportunity to facilitate engagement between external researchers and SANParks managers, rangers and scientists on key research undertaken in and around Algoa Bay, and central to the proposed Addo Marine Protected Area (MPA). The symposium addressed six marine research topics on seabirds (penguins and gannets), mammals (whales, dolphins and seals), predators (fish and sharks), MPAs and the importance of groundwater to coastal ecosystems. In attendance were twelve researchers from four institutions and 40 SANParks delegates representing management and scientific staff from the region.

Interesting research presented at the workshop included the plight of endangered Cape gannets on Bird Island in Algoa Bay, by Ilana Engelbrecht, a Masters student at Nelson Mandela University (NMU), who reported that some parent birds are now flying further away to find food, abandoning their chicks to starvation and attack from predators. In her presentation, she assessed the ability of breeding pairs of gannets to change behaviour and strategies in how they acquire food which might help them cope with food scarcity, eventually leading to the greater success in survival and health of their young.

Similarly, African penguins are also swimming greater distances to find food. The results of an experiment that excluded commercial fishing of small pelagic fish (mainly sardines and anchovies) which are the preferred food of the endangered African penguin, was reported on by Dr Lorien Pichegru, NMU. Fishing with seine nets were paused on an alternating three-year cycle around a 20km radius of two of the largest penguin colonies found on Bird and St Croix islands in Algoa Bay. Excluding fishing meant that more food was available to penguins which led to greater success in survival and health of their young.

Curious findings around the death and strandings of seals and dolphins were presented by Dr Greg Hofmeyr, a researcher at Bayworld in Port Elizabeth. Dedicated monthly beach surveys found twice as many dead animals in St Francis Bay compared to Algoa Bay. A disturbing analysis revealed that seals were killed as a result of gunshot wounds, most likely by fishermen who find them a nuisance since seals often steal their catches. Dr Hofmeyr also described the strandings of 42 common dolphins in Algoa Bay in April 2017 with another 14 reported in April this year. Common dolphins occur further offshore and are drawn closer to the coastline in likely pursuit of prey. The coastal landscape possibly disorientates their sonar abilities causing them to be washed ashore.

The fascinating phenomenon of brown foam in the surf zone near the Sundays River Estuary was described by Professor Eileen Campbell, NMU, to be caused by diatoms – single-celled algae. Nutrient rich groundwater seeping from the Alexandria dune fields sustain these algae that rise to the surface of the water by clinging to foam during the day, causing it to appear brown, only to sink into the bottom sand layer at night where they multiply. The diatoms are non-toxic, highly nutritious and support surrounding fish communities. This raises the importance of groundwater systems and their conservation significance in supporting coastal ecosystems.

Sheltered coastal environments such as Algoa Bay provide an ideal sanctuary for many juvenile and adult fish species. However, changes in temperature as a result of climate change for example can lead to a loss of important species in the Bay. Dr Taryn Murray from the South African Aquatic Biodiversity Institute (SAIAB) described a study that tagged and tracked the movement of four main predatory fish in Algoa Bay, namely dusky kob (dagga salmon), garrick (leervis), ragged toothed shark and great white shark. Her results showed that the tagged fish had different movement patterns but were present in the Bay throughout the years they were tracked, highlighting the importance of this sheltered embayment to these species.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are important tools in managing human activities in order to ensure that ecosystems remain intact to support sustainable and healthy resources including fish. The exact placement and management of MPAs are therefore essential, along with the need to understand their effectiveness in protecting fish stocks. An investigation into the effectiveness of MPAs was carried out by Dr Anthony Bernard, SAIAB, and his team who measured direct (differences in the average biomass of targeted fish species) and indirect (differences in abundance of non-targeted fish species) effects of protection on fish communities inside MPAs. They used a novel method of baited remote underwater cameras that captured video data in five MPAs — De Hoop, Tsitsikamma, Bird Island, Amatola and Pondoland. Each MPA was found to provide a different degree of protection to fish. Bird Island in Algoa Bay had a greater biomass of fish within the MPA compared to outside. This study concluded that MPAs can be effective and contribute to positive ecological outcomes within their boundaries.

That afternoon we welcomed the exciting announcement that 20 new MPAs including the Addo MPA had been endorsed by the South African Cabinet, acknowledging decades of collaboration between SANParks, researchers and other parties to protect South Africa’s rich coastal and ocean biodiversity. These MPAs will increase protection of sensitive marine and coastal features from 0.4% to 5%, an area roughly two and half times the size of Kruger National Park. Full proclamation of the MPAs will be announced next year.

Ongoing engagement through workshops such as the Addo Marine Symposium emphasises the importance of communication and collaboration between research and conservation managers towards achieving a healthy and sustainable marine environment.
Focus on: Kenneth Jewell and Gibson Thambo
By Kaylin Olkers - Communications Intern

It was interesting to see how much attention one man carrying a kudu kop trophy and another a framed certificate received in the departures hall of OR Tambo International Airport on the morning after this year’s Kudu Awards.

I was travelling back to Port Elizabeth with the recipients of the Chief Executive award in the Special Team Efforts category, Gibson Thambo and Kenneth Jewell. They were part of the team from Addo Elephant National Park who looked after the six rhinos from Marakele National Park before they were relocated to Zakouma National Park in Chad.

While they were exceptionally proud, they were equally humble as curious onlookers enquired as to their interesting carry-on luggage. It was fitting then, that I chat to them for this month’s “Focus on” feature.

Asked about their role in the nearly four-month long project, they were quick to modestly acknowledge that various teams were involved in the operation, including Biodiversity Social Projects, Veterinary Wildlife Services and others. They also pointed out that the win goes to not only Conservation Services, or the Park, but to SANParks as a whole.

I asked them about their histories within Addo, and the soft-spoken Gibson told me he started off as a Petrol attendant and eventually became a Ranger. With the shyest of smiles, he said he had been working at the Park for 35 years and still enjoys working for SANParks.

His younger counterpart, Kenneth, explained he enjoys learning from people who have been with the organisation for a number of years, as well as learning from the younger generation with their new ideas. The more vocal of the two, but still quiet nonetheless, Kenneth said he has been working for SANParks for six years. He started as an Environmental monitor whereafter he was promoted to a Ranger position. He is currently a Gate guard and hopes to return to his Ranger position soon.

Asked what they thought their chances were of winning, Gibson said he didn’t expect to win, but that being called up to the stage to accept the award was a pleasant surprise. Kenneth said he was glad that their hard work had been rewarded.

They said some of the challenges they faced were preparing the bomas in time for the arrival of the rhinos. With only a week’s notice of the animals’ arrival, they worked overtime and worked in the sweltering January heat to make it possible.

Congratulations to all the staff members over the various parks and departments for their valuable input in this project.

Unfortunately four of the six rhinos died in two separate incidents since their arrival in Chad, but not from poaching, says African Parks. Post-mortems and tests on blood, tissue and faeces have been sent to a lab in South Africa for testing to establish the cause of death.
New appointments/promotions

Congratulations to Addo’s Jessyca Domingo, who was promoted from Woody Cape Field Ranger to Zuurberg Section Ranger.

Former Zuurberg Section Ranger Zelna Breytenbach has now transferred to Woody Cape as Section Ranger there.

Farewell Nicholas

Knysna staff bid farewell to Nicholas Nelukalo recently. He worked in the Knysna section’s Tourism Department.

Special visitors for Bulelwa

Managing Executive: Parks, Property Mokoena and Regional General Manager in the Cape Region, Norman Johnson, paid Tsitsikamma Area Manager, Bulelwa Msengi a visit while she was in hospital in Cape Town in November. Bulelwa was there to see a kidney specialist after complications the previous week.

Ruigtevlei Primary learners spend time in Wilderness

Phumla Nyathikazi, People and Conservation Officer for Wilderness, spent some time with learners from the Ruigtevlei Primary in Wilderness recently. Some of their activities included ant collecting and identification.

Cancer awareness celebrated in our parks

Mountain Zebra National Park commemorated Cancer awareness month on 31 October by educating its staff members about the different types of cancers and the importance of going for regular check-ups.

A representative from the Eastern Cape Department of Health in Cradock spoke to the staff about the importance of healthy eating and how it could prevent cancer.

Sergeant Ranger, Donovan Antonie, spoke about his real-life experience of having a family member who passed away due to cancer. He also took the opportunity to have his hair shaved at the event in memory of people who have succumbed to the disease and those still fighting it.

Meanwhile, in Knysna, Geneve Lupacchini, Personal Assistant to the Park Manager, did her bit to raise awareness about breast cancer by arranging a walk for staff on Thesen Island. Kitted out in pink, the group surely couldn’t be missed.

Mountain Zebra National Park’s netball team took on the local Department of Health in November, and ended victorious with a final score of 13 – 8.

Their soccer playing colleagues also came out tops against Health, winning 5 – 3 on penalties. Unfortunately they lost 0 – 2 against the Department of Justice.

Win or lose, fun was had all-round!

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