From the Editor’s desk

It’s hard to believe, but we’re in the final stretch of 2013.

It seems we hardly got stuck into the year and before we knew it, we’ve found ourselves in December, with the festive season right upon us. I’m sure that as is human nature, you’ve been reflecting on the year that has been, and I hope you have mostly fond memories of the past months. You must also be looking forward to what lies ahead in 2014.

Looking back from an organisational point of view – we’re most proud to announce that the region scooped three prestigious awards at our recent Chief Executive Awards evening in Pretoria – Addo Elephant National Park’s Main Camp won Best Performing Camp (pg 3) while Mountain Zebra National Park’s Senior Section Ranger, Craig Williams, won The Shield award and Ranger and Guide, Michael Paxton, won in the Best Customer Service category (pg 8).

Other highlights in this edition include a roundup of our SA National Parks Week during September (pg 2), Addo’s International Coastal Clean-up Day activities (pg 3), Camdeboo’s camp greening project (pg 6), a fire in the Karoo (pg 7) and Mountain Zebra’s literacy promotion programme (pg 8).

During the festive season, I implore you to celebrate the year’s achievements, but remember to do so safely. We look forward to catching up again in the New Year, energised to tackle which will once again, I’m sure, prove to be yet another short, but productive year.

I wish you and your loved ones a happy holiday and a prosperous New Year, filled with endless opportunities.

Fayroush Ludick
Regional Communications Manager
South African National Parks Week

AENP hosts successful SA National Parks Week

The eighth annual South African National Parks Week was celebrated from 9 – 13 September, under the theme “Know your National Parks”. The objective of the week-long campaign is to cultivate a sense of understanding and pride in South Africans, of their natural, cultural and historical heritage. The event has proven to be very successful over the years in terms of education and raising awareness around conservation issues.

AENP welcomed 2 580 visitors through its gates during the course of SA National Parks Week. Of these, 1 685 passed through Main Camp’s gate, while the remaining 895 entered through the Matyholweni gate.

Some 221 people participated in People and Conservation’s programme for the week – these were community members and school groups from the Sundays River Valley specifically brought into the Park to participate in the programme and expose them to what the Park has to offer. A further 1 021 learners and teachers who booked through the P&C Department entered the Park during the week.

These figures represent a steady increase in the number of guests to the Park during this period: 2011 – 1 492, 2012 – 2008 and 2013 – 2 580.

At Woody Cape, AENP staff and students spent some time at Alexandria Primary School, where they delivered a presentation to the Grade R’s on what the week is all about, SANParks, Addo Elephant National Park and the Big 7. It must also be highlighted that since the Park’s involvement with the school, they have taken the initiative and started their own wildlife/nature programme.

Hundreds of learners experienced MZNP

A total of 615 people made use of the free entry into Mountain Zebra National Park during SA National Parks Week. Of those, the majority were children – 429, with 186 adults rounding up the total. We’re sure they enjoyed the programmes offered by the Park’s P&C Department – which comprised of talks about and a guided tour of the Park.

A first-time visit to Karoo National Park for many

A total of 375 people – 340 adults and 35 children, passed through Karoo National Park’s gates during SA National Parks Week. Some 190 of these participated in the Park’s People and Conservation programmes. On top of this, Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, extended the free-entry week to the first 100 people on each day of the following weekend, during which time a further 109 people visited the Park at no cost, bringing the total number of free-entry visits to 484.

Camdeboo extended the invitation to the weekend

A total of 440 people visited Camdeboo National Park at no cost during SA National Parks Week. A further 430 made use of Park Manager, Peter Burdett’s decision to open up the Park for free on the weekend thereafter, bringing the total number of visitors to the Park over this period to 870.
International Coastal Clean-up Day
Honorary Rangers and AENP Staff

A whopping mountain of rubble, weighing in at over 300kg, was removed from the coast along the Sundays River coastline and estuary on International Coastal Clean-up Day on 21 September.

The now annual event can be traced back to 1986 when a woman, walking along the beach of South Padre Island, Texas, was appalled at the amount of dirt she saw. Linda Maraniss immediately felt compelled to do something about it. As a former employee of Ocean Conservancy (then known as the Centre for Environmental Education), she knew something about solutions. Team up with like-minded people, she organised a beach clean-up. In only two hours, 2 800 Texans picked up 124 tons of dirt along 122 miles of coastline. Since then, that effort has rippled out across the globe, and has now grown into a much-loved and much-valued experience that nearly half-a-million people look forward to each year - with more joining annually.

A team consisting of AENP staff, Honorary Rangers and their family members and the general public were on hand. What’s scary is that the amount of garbage collected is but a fraction of what winds up in the water – threatening marine life and damaging ecosystems every day.

Split into two groups – the Coastal team tackled the area from Sundays River mouth to 10km up the coast. The Estuary team, in the meantime, got to work in the area from the Pearson Park slipway to the metal bridge.

Some objects collected on the day were stranger than others. This is the list of items collected – ranging from the highest amount of the particular item collected, to the least:

- Plastic ear bud sticks, plastic sticks of suckers (lolly pops), plastic bottle caps (bottled water and Coke), general plastic pieces, plastic food wrappers (chips and sweets), glass pieces, glass beverage bottles, plastic beverage bottles, rope, plastic lids, fishing nets, fishing lures (squid), plastic grocery bags and even a tractor tyre.

Altogether a whopping 2.5 tons of litter was collected along the section of the coast during the Sundays River Trash Bash.

CONGRATULATIONS
ADDO MAIN CAMP
On your 2012/2013 Chief Executive Award
Category: Best Performing Camp
Hospitality Services Manager, Dawid Momberg, was on hand to accept the award on the Camp’s behalf.
SANParks hands over school computer lab in Paterson
South African National Parks (SANParks) delivered on its vision of ‘Connecting to Society’ at the official handover of a computer laboratory at Paterson High School near the Addo Elephant National Park on 18 September.

Most of the country’s national parks’ workforce is sourced from its neighbouring communities. As such, it is only fitting that SANParks gives back to the community members who play an integral role in its success as a premier conservation and tourism destination.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, Managing Executive: Parks, Dr Nomvuselele Songelwa, said: “As part of our new positioning and living up to our vision of ‘South African National Parks Connecting to Society’, SANParks initiated a corporate social investment (CSI) programme as a way to align with and contribute to government’s mandate towards social development.”

“A dedicated community levy was established to ensure SANParks’ tangible benefit to communities living adjacent to national parks in bettering their livelihoods. In partnership with government departments, municipalities, local communities and other key stakeholders, SANParks is investing resources in the establishment of legacy projects in communities, particularly in rural areas where our national parks are located,” Songelwa continued. She said these will include support through the provision of required infrastructure and related resources in areas of education, youth development, health and other areas as identified with community stakeholders and relevant institutions.

The official handover of the Sandisulwazi Computer Laboratory is an indication of the promise SANParks has made to ‘Connect to Society’, and follows three similar projects handed over in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape with plans to work with other provinces as well.

The project, valued at R1.1 million, will go a long way towards improving the learning and development of learners at the school. The school intends to use the lab and introduce Computer Applications Technology as a subject starting from the 2014 academic year. Furthermore, the investment will not only benefit the school’s 320 learners but the surrounding community members too. The classroom, equipped with 32 learner workstations and one for a teacher was set up in a previously dilapidated classroom which first required renovations before any equipment could be brought in. This was carried out by AENP’s Technical Department.

“Through these programmes and many others, we will continue to develop reciprocal relationships between protected areas and neighbouring communities, making our national parks a true mirror of our society’s environmental values,” Songelwa concluded.

AENP celebrates World Ranger Day
Smoke bombs dropped from an overhead plane, flares shot into the air, gun-shots rang out, a high speed car chase ensued and numerous arrests were the order of the day in Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) on 31 July – but only as part of a simulated rhino poaching exercise on World Ranger Day.

The day is celebrated annually, to remember rangers who were killed or injured in the line of duty and to celebrate and acknowledge the work being done by both the men and women in green. On a daily basis, the world’s rangers put their lives in danger to protect the world’s heritage, and with the current onslaught of rhino poaching in South Africa, they are the last barrier between a rhino and a poacher.

Since the start of 2013, a total of over 700 rhino have been killed for their horns, with the Kruger National Park remaining at the forefront of the onslaught.

On the day, AENP’s Management, Staff and Honorary Rangers came together to celebrate the occasion with the Park’s 75-member strong ranger contingent – those responsible for the Park not having suffered one case of poaching as yet.

Speaking at the event, Regional Ranger, John Adendorff, honoured the rangers on the work they do. “Over the past ten years, over one thousand rangers have lost their lives in the line of duty all over the world. Even though the threats increase daily, we’re here because we have a passion for what we do and we believe in this worthy cause – protecting our environment for our children and the generations to follow,” he said.

He went further, commending all his colleagues from other departments who had also gathered. “While we’re in the frontline, doing the actual anti-poaching and law enforcement, those of you behind the scenes who make our work possible are rangers in every sense of the word, too. You make us the success that we are, and I thank you,” said Adendorff.
Celebrating Marine Week

Marine Week was celebrated in Alexandria between 14 and 18 October. This year’s theme was “BUOY-O”, which is an acronym for Better Understanding of Your Oceans. The main focus during the week-long programme was to create awareness and educate people about our coastline. Twelve schools from the surrounding area attended the Marine Week exhibition, which was run and organised jointly by Working for the Coast and Park staff.

Moving towards Addo’s Marine Protected Area

SANParks and the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries met with commercial fisheries in Port Elizabeth to further discuss the proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) off Algoa Bay – a biodiversity hot spot along the South African coast.

The area is key as it is home to the highest percentage of endemic line fish species, is home to the largest breeding populations of gannets and penguins and has the longest, most productive sandy beach in the Southern Hemisphere.

The main objectives of the MPA are to conserve biodiversity, focus on threatened overexploited species, contribute to rebuilding fish stocks and minimising conflict and cost to fisheries activities.

The idea behind an MPA started in 1997 under the Greater Addo project. Research into baseline environmental and fisheries data was carried out between 2006 and 2012, systematic conservation and draft management plans have been complete, an economic cost benefit analysis has been carried out and there’ve been seven years of consultation with Marine and Coastal Management, the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Forests and Fisheries, industry and communities.

The input from the sessions with the industries will be used in a proposal to go to the Minister of Environmental Affairs. She’ll then have to gazette an “Intent to declare an MPA”, which will afford the public 60 days’ comment and during which another one or two public meetings will be held. Issues raised during this time will have to be addressed by the department within 30 days. Thereafter, the Minister will gazette the “Declaration of the MPA”.

AENP and Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism join forces to promote the Park

Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) and Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism (NMBT) have embarked on a joint partnership in promoting day visits to the Park. NMBT is already an official reservation office for all South African National Parks (SANParks) and offers accommodation bookings to all national parks as well as certain SANParks products such as the renowned Otter Trail in the Tsitsikamma National Park.

Visitors can now book and pay for their day visits to AENP in advance at any of the NMBT Visitor Information centres as well as through the NMBT call centre on (041) 582 2575.

Nelson Mandela Bay Pass holders can now also gain free entrance to Addo Elephant National Park as NMBT has included free day visits to the Park on the Pass.

The Nelson Mandela Bay Pass, a smartcard access card, provides holders with free admission to a variety of attractions and activities in Nelson Mandela Bay. This includes amongst others museums, game reserves, scuba diving, art galleries, sightseeing tours and many more. It also entitles them to some great discounts in selected stores for shopping, activities, entertainment and more. The Nelson Mandela Bay Pass offers flexibility, convenience, variety and savings.
Trees for Camdeboo campsite
By Peter Burdett

A project aimed at greening the Camdeboo National Park campsite came to fruition recently after a cash injection of more than R20 000 in the form of donations by members of the public. The project was promoted on the SANParks website over the past year and received a number of generous donations towards improving the environment for future Park visitors.

The Nqweba Campsite and Lakeview Tent Camp in the Park surrounding Graaff-Reinet were established in an Acacia (sweet thorn) woodland on the fringe of the Nqweba Dam. These trees, however, lose their leaves in winter, leaving these facilities bleak and without shade. The purpose of the project was thus to plant suitable indigenous trees to enhance the climate of the visitor accommodation facilities.

The species chosen to fill this need was Rhus lancea, more commonly known as Karee, which is indigenous to the Camdeboo National Park. It is an attractive evergreen tree which grows quickly to a height of about eight metres or more and has an affinity for the habitat found along the fringe of dams or rivers.

The dense canopy of this tree will provide ideal shade for campers. A total of 93 considerably-sized trees have been planted to date. Park Manager, Peter Burdett, has thanked all of the donors who contributed to the project and assured them that the funds have been put to meaningful use.

Theft of boundary fences
By Peter Burdett

Camdeboo National Park has started a project to replace approximately 21km of stock fencing with 2.4m high game fencing.

Section Ranger, Johannes Jaantjies, will be initiating a programme to give some of the old fencing materials to the residents of new municipal houses that were built in Graaff-Reinet recently. It is hoped that this co-operation with the community will lead to a reduction in the destruction of the Park boundary by criminals who are selling the materials to the new home owners to fence their plots. Field Rangers from the Park will be visiting new home owners to establish their fencing needs and if needed to recover any material that has already been removed from the Park boundary.

Re-establishing the Honorary Rangers
A social function hosted by Park Manager, Peter Burdett, to re-establish the Honorary Rangers was advertised and organised by Park staff during August. This was attended by 12 members from the community. Des Botha from the NEC gave a talk to introduce the Honorary Rangers programme and distributed membership forms. A total of five people have joined to date.

Kids in Parks
The Kids in Park programme kicked off on 5 August and followed for the next five weeks. At the end of the first week the P&C Assistant went into early labour, leaving the programme in the hands of the Park Manager, Field Guide, Dimitri Williams and four students. The entire programme was delivered without a hitch thanks mainly to the capability of Dimitri with the help of the students. A total of 483 children and 23 teachers benefitted from this endeavor.
Karoo National Park

Karoo fire
Park Rangers and Working on Fire teams had their work cut out for them at the beginning of October when a fire, which started on a neighbouring farm, spread into the Park.

The fire was fanned by a northerly wind which blew the fire towards the Park’s north-eastern section called Mountain View – which consists of mountain or escarpment veld – well away from the rest camp. Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, said the wind had luckily been blowing the fire and smoke away from the rest camp, so there was never any danger to guests. “It was only when they went up on the Lammertjiesleegte self-drive trail that they experienced some smoke in the area,” said van der Walt. Depending on the wind direction, visitors in the rest camp may only have picked up on the faint smell of smoke.

The fire started on Saturday 5 October, with the Park’s Conservation team fighting the fire on their own until the Tuesday. Support from Working on Fire (WoF) was requested and a team of fire fighters was dispatched. Aerial support was also called in from the Southern Cape Fire Protection Agency to assist with control strategies and to attempt to water bomb some of the crucial fires that endangered infrastructure such as the Sentoeh tower and crucial radio communications stations in the central Karoo which belongs to various government entities including the Park’s own. At its peak, a total of 62 people were deployed and consisted of Park Rangers, two WoF teams, Transnet staff and the Beaufort West Fire Department.

By Thursday afternoon the fire had been extinguished. It however flared up again on the Friday night, fanned by strong winds. Initially confined to the section of the Park called Mountain View – this time the fire spread to the Park’s middle plateau.

Park Rangers and two WoF teams returned to fight three separate fires over the weekend of 11 – 13 October, and by the Sunday afternoon they had all been extinguished. The wind had, in the meantime, also subsided. The WoF teams remained in the area for the next 48 hours to monitor the situation and ensure that the fire didn’t flare up again. The total size of the area affected by the fire is estimated at between 5 000 and 6 000 hectares.

Arbor Day in Karoo National Park
By Esna van Zyl
Staff at Karoo National Park participated in three Arbor Day projects this year. They planted trees at the primary and high schools in Murraysburg (as part of the regional celebrations), the Beaufort West Golf Course and at a new school – Beaufort West Primary School in Hillside.

You’ll hopefully remember the story of Brandy the ostrich who Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, picked up roaming the Park on his own as a young chick. A chicken had to be brought in to teach him how to feed. Now Brandy’s all grown up and recently returned to the veld to spend the rest of his days…
Honorary Rangers Report
Mountain Zebra National Park’s Honorary Rangers staged two successful events during August and September – first the Golf Day in Middelburg and later the Birding Weekend in the Park.

Secretary and Treasurer, Willem Olivier, says the Golf Day was one of the biggest days ever held in Middelburg, with 81 players who participated. More than R11 000 was raised during the course of the day.

The second annual Sasol Birding Weekend was equally enjoyable. Prof. Adrian Craig from Rhodes University in Grahamstown was the guest speaker over the weekend of 6 – 8 September. A total of 39 birders participated in the weekend, with top honours going to a team from Port Elizabeth with 79 species spotted for the day. Altogether, 166 species were spotted during the day by the different teams.

The Park’s rangers, led by Park Manager Megan Taplin once again competed for the SASOL Mountain Zebra floating trophy. While the HR’s won the trophy last year, a strong team effort from the rangers this year snatched the award from the HR’s hands.

Olivier says it was a very successful weekend and participants have already booked their places for next year’s event, which will be held in March when Ulrich Oberprieler will present an SMS (Swallows, Martins and Swifts) course.

CONGRATULATIONS
CRAIG WILLIAMS (Top) and
MICHAEL PAXTON (Below)
On your 2012/2013
Chief Executive Awards
Categories:
The Shield and
Best
Customer Service

MZNP hosts literacy promotion programme
By Mxolisi Fulumente
MZNP, in conjunction with the Department of Education, held an exciting District Readathon Day at the Park on 19 September under the theme “Explore the world around you”.

Winners from three clusters, namely Tarkastad, Tendergate and Thornhill competed in the Readathon. Prior to the day’s activities getting underway, the attendees were briefed about the Park and why natural and cultural resources are so invaluable.

The question put to the learners then was “What is the relationship between literacy and conservation?” and the responses were, “The more the learners read about and explore their natural and cultural resources, the more information they will have on these items, which will make them better stewards of our resources in future.”

All the participants were awarded with certificates of participation and goody bags filled with stationery. This was the first event of its kind between the Park and the Department, and afterwards there was agreement that it would be done again next year.

Celebrating Women’s Day
It was all about empowering women at the joint MZNP and Working for Water Women’s Day celebrations on 12 August.

Park Manager, Megan Taplin, opened the session, and she was followed by local guest speaker, Nolundi Jacobs. Despite facing numerous challenges throughout life, Nolundi is a well-established entrepreneur, who owns her own catering company and will be opening a Bed and Breakfast soon.

She emphasised to the gathered women that they need to harness their full potential and realise that the decisions they make about their families are the key to improving their lives and the lives of those around them. Nolundi tried to convey to her audience that like her - not only despite of, but because of all the challenges they face, they can still make it in life.