Background: Sylvester first escaped from Karoo National Park on 5 June 2015 last year and managed to evade capture for over three weeks. After his capture he was fitted with a combination satellite/VHF collar to find his location should he manage to get out again. This collar then alerted authorities on 28 March last year that the lion had once again left the park’s boundary, and played a big role in tracking him and returning him back to the Park much quicker – three days later on 31 March. There was then much deliberation about where he could be relocated to, and in May 2016 he finally arrived at Kuzuko.

The two lionesses arrived at Kuzuko in May 2015. They became a national news item in December 2014 when park authorities made a desperate plea for visitors to report any sightings of them after their mother died of a suspected snake bite. More than six weeks after they were last seen and long after park staff had given up all hope of finding them alive, new light arose when a guide alerted rangers that he may have spotted them on 10 January 2015. Although sceptical, the park’s rangers still went out and miraculously found the cubs – albeit severely malnourished and lethargic.

Finally, the younger male also has a tale to tell – being the only male in a litter born to Josie last year. He would have experienced the same fate Sylvester did had he been left in Addo’s main camp section of the park – being driven out of the pride and having to fend for himself, possibly even killed by older, more dominant lions. He was moved to Kuzuko to join Sylvester in June last year.

It’s been about three weeks since the infamous Sylvester the lion was set free into the 15 000 hectare property of Addo’s Kuzuko contractual area, and he seems to be enjoying his new-found freedom. That’s understandable, as that’s suddenly a whole lot of area to get acquainted to after spending the last few months in a 200 hectare enclosure.

It took him only minutes to move out of this holding area when the fence was cut at the end of January, followed shortly afterwards by the other male he’d had for company. It didn’t take them long to then start exploring their new home.

The two lionesses in the area were released a few days earlier when SANParks vet, Dr David Zimmerman darted them and fitted one with a tracking collar. As they are never far apart, one collar will provide the location of both at any given time. “On their first night out they caught a kudu and the very next morning a red hartebeest, confirmation that they can successfully fend for themselves in the wild,” said Addo Elephant National Park Conservation Manager, John Adendorff.

“Sylvester almost immediately showed signs of being the pride leader. The very weekend of their release, he chased the females off a kill they had made,” continued Adendorff.

Sylvester, too, has proven that he hasn’t forgotten how to hunt, having caught many a meal on his own since their release.

“Now that it appears he finally has a place where he belongs, without threat, and the fact that he has bonded so closely with the younger male, we are confident that Sylvester will have no need to ever stray again. His satellite tracking collar location is monitored regularly and easily provides us with an accurate assessment of where the two are,” Adendorff said.
Construction of the six new two-sleeper cottages and two rock chalets (sleeping four people) are progressing well – as can be seen in these photographs taken last week. Construction should be complete within the next two months, and we anticipate that should everything go according to plan, the units will be launched in June or July.

Addo Elephant National Park
- Enjoyed the horse ride. Pleased with how well the horses are cared for and the guide was excellent.
- We stayed for one night at Spekboom and one night in a rondavel as part of our honeymoon. We loved all of it!
- Very good value and amazing seeing 250 or more elephants at a waterhole.

Camdeboo National Park
- The camp site was very nice and should actually be a model for many other national parks which are poor by comparison.
- We will definitely recommend SANParks and Camdeboo to friends.
- Very friendly. What a pleasure!

Garden Route National Park
- Will definitely return and recommend to friends and family. I hope the standards of service will be maintained as it does add to the overall park experience.
- What a beautiful area! We thoroughly enjoyed the Otter Trail.
- Pretty impressed by the temporary restaurant. Considering the recent fire, the team did well to run the restaurant during the festive season.

Karoo National Park
- Awesome park, big sky and breathtaking beauty. The Karoo NP is well run by caring staff from reception to the lady cleaning the accommodation.
- Compliments to the management and staff. The shop was the best I have ever seen in SANParks.
- The option of a packed breakfast was wonderful. Great food, made with care. Thank you.
- You can see that the Park is under very good management. Everything is clean and is working. The shop is also better than all the shops in the bigger parks.
- We really enjoyed the Park. We drove the 4x4 routes extensively and enjoyed the solitude/lack of people. Also the roads were well maintained and the road signs/markers were generally clear and easy to follow.

Mountain Zebra National Park
- We did not have a booking and were overjoyed that the reservation staff found us accommodation in a mountain cottage. They were very helpful and friendly.
- We were four minutes late at the gate, but the gentleman was so kind as to open and let us in. We were so thankful to him and all the staff who were very helpful. We thoroughly enjoyed our stay at the Park.
- The gentleman that handled our admission gave us the most friendly and engaging welcome we have ever received at any Park. Truly exceptional and genuine!

Compliment of the month:
We spent the night at MZNP on 25 December and despite the restaurant and reception being VERY busy with a Christmas lunch and many new guests arriving, the staff went out of their way to be helpful and friendly. Fantastic service and accommodation as always – we go every year and have already booked and paid for our stay in 2018! We were lucky enough to see two lions and two lionesses, close to the picnic spot in the one instance!

Then on to Karoo National Park – we were there for three nights at the beginning of January and again great service and accommodation as always. Both these parks are on our TOP list and we go there every year! We have already booked and paid for our stay in 2018! We were lucky enough to see two lions and two lionesses, close to the picnic spot in the one instance!

Also to comment on the good roads in both the Parks – very impressive every year and as always. The staff members really do score more than 100% for their friendliness, attitude, care and helpfulness in all ways.

Best regards,
Heather and Graham Dukas

The work and life of a ranger is a tough one – which often goes unnoticed and generally taken for granted. These men and women can be found camping inside any one of our national parks on any night of the week – living off the bare essentials and getting by with the minimum while protecting our country’s natural assets.

Thanks to a wonderful donation sourced by SANParks Honorary Ranger, Professor Paul van Helden, the work of rangers at Camdeboo and Mountain Zebra National Parks has been made a considerably easier. This was after similar donations to Addo Elephant and Karoo about two years ago.

Some of the items received: torches and lanterns, tents, camping crockery, cutlery and utensils, mattresses and sleeping bags, cooler bags, water bottles, hydration bladders, shoes, boots and jackets.

All the equipment, except for the LED Lenser torches (which are from Awesome Tools), were donated by Cape Union Mart. Thank you to both these organisations and Paul for their wonderful generosity!

Donations make rangers’ lives easier

Compliments received

Mountain Zebra rest camp extension update

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Leadership – nature’s way

This year’s Prefects at cradock’s Michausdal Primary School were treated to a day at Mountain Zebra National Park at the beginning of the school year to learn not only about nature, but about leadership skills as well.

In the capable hands of People and Conservation Officer, Mxolisi Fulumente, the learners were educated on the three pillars of SANParks: tourism, conservation and constituency building. He also spoke to them about the history of the Park and the leadership skills and qualities that can be learnt from the animal kingdom.

Conservation student, Joti Daya, then tackled issues of biodiversity with the young leaders. She also covered the various tourism facilities the Park has to offer and spoke about cultural heritage in the Park.

After a morning of learning, the group went on a game drive, enjoyed a picnic and cooled off in the Park’s swimming pool.

Owl care at Karoo

These two spotted eagle owls called Karoo National Park home for the last two months. A resident from Beaufort West found them as orphans and brought them to the Park for care. The feathered friends were finally deemed ready to head off on their own at the end of January and released in the caravan park, where they’re still regularly seen.

Another owl, brought in from the town of Prins Albert, was also released in the rest camp. Another two barn owl chicks are still being looked after and will soon be released in the same area from their owl box at the Park’s Interpretive Centre. These owls work wonders in keeping rodent problems in both the caravan park and rest camp at bay.

A juvenile rock kestrel was also recently released from the rehab cages back into the Park. Due to all the bird species which have been rehabilitated recently, a section of the old nursery has now been converted into a rehab unit - large enough for birds of prey to fly in.

Well done to all involved!

World Wetlands Day

World Wetlands Day has been internationally recognised since 1971 – and focuses on education around the importance of healthy wetlands in reducing impacts of extreme disasters, such as floods and drought, as well as sustaining life. This year’s theme was “Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction”, which two of our Parks carried through to schools in their areas.

Camdeboo National Park’s People and Conservation Department celebrated World Wetlands Day on 2 February with the Grade 11 learners at the Nqweba High School in Graaff-Reinet.

Senior People and Conservation Officer, Rosemary Scheepers and Assistant People and Conservation Officer, Zimkhitha Zungula, presented on the topic to 84 learners on the day. They explained what wetlands are, the different types of wetlands, why they are important and how the learners can help protect them.

Meanwhile, at Addo Elephant National Park, 81 learners and three educators from Malmaison Primary, a school from one of the eight communities neighbouring the Park, commemorated the day with the local People and Conservation department.

After a short lesson, the learners listed various forms of negative effects imposed by humans on wetlands, including various forms of pollution. Thereafter, a much anticipated game drive was undertaken, where the learners got to see the impact of the drought on the animals and the important role played by the Sundays River in sustaining the wildlife in the Park.

Addo hosts Action Arte Foundation

On 2 February Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) played host to a non-profit group from the Cape Flats, the ActionArte Foundation. The group, which works closely with communities, explores a (humans only) circus environment as a launch pad for physical and playful activities which can provide a safe place for children outside of the sometimes harsh realities of daily life. It is also a facilitator programme, aiming at creating skilful social circus instructors and professional performers.

The group was created out of a desire to offer a circus with a multi-spectrum approach, with a particular focus on how circus arts and creations can represent present stories within and across social dynamics.

AENP showed the group its support by granting them access to host a live performance in the Park and at two community schools adjacent to the Park - AV Bukani and St Ignitious Primary Schools. The learners, Park visitors and staff members alike we thrilled by the performances.

ActionArte’s goal is to be recognised by educational, art, culture and social development bodies to create strong, positive, self-thinking, creative citizens that can and will make for a better future of South Africa and the world.
Camdeboo National Park celebrated a number of long service awards recently. The award certificates were handed over by Park Manager, Nick de Goede, who congratulated the staff and thanked them for their continued dedication and loyalty towards the Park.

The region’s Human Capital Practitioners kicked off the year with a workshop presented by Metropolitan Wellness in Addo recently. The Employee Wellness Programme (EWP) service is provided to support staff and their families. It is designed to offer professional and confidential assessment and counselling services. In addition to counselling, the EWP also provides information and education on a wide range of work/life issues, e.g. legal and financial.

As in any organisation, many employees experience emotional issues, family and home life conflicts, mental health concerns, substance abuse problems, and other health disorders that can interfere with their ability to do their work effectively. This is where Metropolitan Wellness enters, championed by each Park’s Human Capital Practitioner.

The group was given training on what exactly the definition of employee wellness is, what their roles are, the SANParks Employee Wellness Programme and basic counselling and facilitation skills.

Employee wellness
in the spotlight

Camdeboo long service awards

Dennis Marais
5 years

Rosemary Scheepers
5 years

Alban Booysen
10 years

James Maarman
25 years

Johannes Jantjies
25 years

Nozodwa Nkanunu
25 years

Nombulelo Daki
Admin Clerk
as from February

Joti Daya
Conservation student
as from January

Sandiswa Kula
Conservation student
as from 1 February

Robert Rikhotso
20 years long service

MZNP Staff News