Tsitsikamma received a new vessel in December to better equip its law enforcement teams to patrol Africa’s largest Marine Protected Area (MPA).

The low number of reported incidents in the MPA to-date is attributed to the visibility of law enforcement officers including SANParks rangers, SAPS, traffic officers and others. In Tsitsikamma, a live tortoise was confiscated and released back into the wild after a roadblock at Boskor. Area Manager for Tsitsikamma, Bulelwa Msengi, says “We also confiscated plant roots, a full bag of shells, rocks from the beach and others.”

Partnerships with key stakeholders such as the local Community Policing Forums, community neighbourhood watches, SAPS, the Traffic Department and other environmental agencies were forged to tackle environmental crimes.

In November, a 5.8m Infanta rubber duck was launched in Knysna waters. It has two Yamaha 60-horse power, is certified by South African Maritime Safety Authority under Category C, meaning it complies with all safety requirements and has equipment to enable it to go out to sea and assist other stakeholders if and when necessary.

The vessel will be used for compliance monitoring patrols, maintenance, research (internal and external researchers, local and international), rescue operations and assistance to other stakeholders (SAPS, DAFF, NSRI). Senior Section Ranger for Marine in Knysna, Owen Govender, says most people were fined in the previous financial year for not having fishing permits, use of seine nets, exceeding daily limits and collecting bait by means other than by hand in the Knysna estuary.
Message from Dries Engelbrecht, Regional General Manager

Law enforcement is unfortunately a necessary part of our work at South African National Parks. This goes hand in hand with the work of our ranger corps while doing environmental monitoring, and becomes even more of a priority over our busy periods in parks. Addo Elephant National Park rangers, for example, issued numerous fines over the December/January period for crimes such as visitors trying to leave the Park in possession of an eland skull, kudu horns, elephant dung and spekboom. Other fines were issued for getting out of vehicles in the game viewing area as well as late arrivals at gates exiting the Park in the evenings. We commend and thank all our staff members who not only do their best on a daily basis in this regard, but more so over the festive season while the rest of us were enjoying valuable time off with family and friends. A special word of thanks as well to our Honorary Rangers – who were also on duty assisting over the holidays (pg 4).

I hope you enjoy this busy edition as we tell you about snakes (pg 3), stuffed lions (pg 4), fun runs (pg 5) and everything else in between.

We have well and truly kicked off this year running, and are looking forward to a successful 2018. May you make the most of it too!

Compliments received

Addo Elephant
Umsinsi cottage (Woody Cape section): The “cottage on the hill” is the best kept secret in the area. We loved the peace and tranquility and best of all, being on your own without another soul in sight. The views from the deck were amazing, especially seeing the clouds rolling in from the sea in the late afternoon and watching the sunrise over the far distant hill. We had various species of birds taking turns to show themselves just a mere 10 metres from the cottage and now and again you’ll see a flash of red floating between two trees – a Knysna Lourie. We thoroughly enjoyed our stay in this special hideaway.

Karoo
My last trip started in the Karoo National Park. Absolute top score! The people are VERY FRIENDLY, helpful and the place is spotlessly clean and tidy. The roads are well-maintained – an absolute pleasure.

Mountain Zebra
I think Jeanie Botha encapsulates everything that one would expect from this fantastic little Park. In fact, as a frequent visitor to the Kruger, I wish that sometimes, if I could, I would take her to the Kruger so that the staff there could see real customer care in action. After a long drive from Johannesburg all your troubles just vanish when greeted by that caring, professional, smiling young lady. Thank you Jeanie for being the smiling face that greets us on many of our visits.

Compliment of the month:
Usually people complain but today it is quite the opposite. I visited Addo (just for a few hours) and three days in the Tsitsikamma National Park (DeVasselot Rest Camp) during my break. What a fantastic experience! I don’t think I have to tell you anything of the beauty of the places. What I would like to tell you about is the excellent service we had at DeVasselot. The facilities are basic but affordable (to people like me who does not have the world of money) but the cleanliness and service was five star. From the reception to the cleaning staff were friendly and efficient. It makes one proud to say you work for DEA of which SANParks is an entity of the department. (By the way, the staff did not know that I was from DEA or involved in environmental protection, to them I was just an ordinary tourist).

I have to give my colleagues at EPP and the Working for the Coast programme some credit too. They are really adding value in the parks. I was comparing the facilities on the beach managed by the local authority with what you have in the SANParks facilities. It is two different worlds. Luvuyo, his team and your SANParks team are doing stunning work. Our facilities are truly on par with some of the best I have experienced across the world. My booking for Jan 2019 has already been made.

Thanks again to SANParks for a wonderful service you provide to our country!

Regards
Dr. Christo Marais
Chief Director: Natural Resource Management Programmes (NRM)
Department of Environmental Affairs

RIP Valli

Valli, Addo Elephant National Park’s big elephant bull, was found dead on 28 December. Conservation Manager, John Adendorff, flew over the Park that morning and found him killed about five kilometres from Hapoor Dam. He seemed to have gotten into a fight with another bull and died from his injuries about a week earlier.

He was one of four Kruger bulls introduced into Addo in the early 2000’s. Two of the bulls were really large - Skukuza and Valli. Skukuza met the same fate in 2010.

Valli stood out head and shoulders amongst the Addo animals. He is the father of many young elephants in Addo and his genes will help ensure the success of the elephant population in Addo for many years to come.

Inevitably his very tusks were most likely his downfall. He would not have been as agile as a bull with smaller, more lethal tusks.

Valli was just coming into musth three weeks prior. This is when these bulls are filled with testosterone and they are very prone to fights.

This was really a tragic loss for Addo. Valli, who was extremely passive in nature and an icon in the Park. It is very tragic for all who knew this gentle giant, but his offspring live on.
SANParks teams (local Working for Water) and Knysna marine rangers have prioritised clearing alien invasive plants bordering the Knysna River. The purpose of the project is to allow more water to flow freely as invasive alien plant species (IAPs) suck up valuable water.

Managing this task for the last three years is Maretha Alant, who is the Environmental Planner for the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). “We took advantage of the good weather forecast recently to clear alien islands in the Knysna River above the Charlsford Weir. This is where extraction pipes are located that supply water to the residents of Knysna,” she said.

Alant and her teams have found creative ways of transporting cleared material across the river to the other side. “A challenge facing us in this task was finding teams with good swimmers. We’ve created a barge and are able to transport all felled trees on this barge across the river,” she continued.

GRNP Manager Paddy Gordon, said the Working for Water programme has multiple advantages. It creates work for locals, removes invasive alien plants which is great for both the river and now more water can be released into the Knysna River. The Knysna River feeds the Knysna estuary which is managed as a protected environment under the GRNP. The estuary opens up to the sea.

The initiative to clear IAPs is one of several measures to promote conservation outcomes in the Park’s ‘buffer zone.’ A buffer zone was established around the Park as a strategy to protect the integrity of the Garden Route National Park.

Efforts to secure more water for the Knysna River

Karoo’s Senior Section Ranger, Riaan Nel, caught this Cape cobra in his office early in January. Believe it or not, he says he became aware of the “visitor” when he felt his tongue against his leg.

Entrance fees at the annual SPAR Kirkwood Wildsfees have not been allowed to run wild and will be the same as in 2017 – despite a bigger and better programme.

Included in the entrance fee over the weekend of 29 June to 1 July this year is the Kirkwood Wildsfees Game auction, all the live entertainment by South Africa’s favourite musicians on the giant Wildsfees stage, supervised entertainment for kids in a special child-friendly festival-within-a-festival and a full day’s demonstrations, Walking on the Wildside and other activities.

“We are the only festival in South Africa with its own special kids’ festival, where the youngsters are free to go wild (under supervision) while the rest of the family enjoys the shopping and entertainment,” says Festival director, Jenni Honsbein.

Free entertainment will be presented in four separate locations – the giant main stage, the Flavoursfontein Beach Bar, the Coca-Cola Stage and the KykNET Leefstyl Plein stage.

There will be more artists than ever on the main stage in 2018. Included in the galaxy of stars will be nine artists on stage on Friday, 15 on Saturday and nine on Sunday.

Adult tickets cost R150 per day for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. A weekend pass will be R350. For festival goers aged between seven and 17 tickets cost R70 per day for Friday, Saturday and Sunday and R150 for a weekend pass. For SASSA pensioners tickets can be purchased at the gate only for R100 per day.
Exeter University is a United Kingdom-based University with a relationship with Addo Elephant National Park. This came about as a result of an initiative by one of the Mayibuye Ndlovu Development Trust members, Muffy Miller, and sees representatives from the university visiting the Park annually. The number of students visiting varies from 20 to 45 per year, who are accompanied by two lecturers.

This year the group visited the Park on 16 January. The group consisted of third year students focused on environmental related studies. During their visit to Addo their main interest was the Park’s community relations with the neighbouring communities and projects that are in place to assist the surrounding eight communities.

The Park’s People and conservation officer, Miranda Moraba, did a presentation on the different community projects that are done by the Park and other stakeholders. This was followed by a presentation by Mayibuye Ndlovu Development Trust Manager, Charlie Josephs, on projects that the Trust has been involved with in an attempt to improve the lives of the people living on the Park’s borders. These include early childhood, youth and sports development, as well as SMME development on both social and economic projects.

After the presentation the group headed to Enon, one of the communities around Addo, where they visited one of the oldest churches in the area. Their day ended with a visit to one of the crèches in Langbos, located five kilometres outside the Park. Here they handed out donations of toys and other learning materials to the excited and eager juniors and also spent some time playing with the youngsters.

Two Beaufort West taxidermists, Ricus and Waldo de Vries, have returned a lion which died in Karoo National Park about two years ago to the Park.

Senior People and Conservation Officer, Esna van Zyl, says the mount has pride of place in the Interpretive Centre and receives lots of attention from visitors. They are currently also waiting for the animal’s skeleton to be returned, which will also be added to the exhibit.

While most of us spent our December vacations relaxing and enjoying our time off with friends and family, members of SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Addo region were hard at work erecting new signs within the game viewing area and doing maintenance at the Interpretive Centre at Main Camp. Thank you for your continued dedication, HR’s!
The Tsitsikamma Honorary Rangers and the section’s People & Conservation department, led by Nobulimko Gantsho, organised a running event in the Park over the festive season to liven up the area.

Congratulations to Gladys Danster, who was promoted from Laundry supervisor to Senior housekeeper at the end of last year.

Also, welcome to new Gate guard, Monwabisi Marinana and Technical officer, Wiseman Hlope, who joined the Park late last year as well. We wish them all the best and trust they will have long and fruitful careers at SANParks.