Addo Elephant National Park’s three lion cubs which rose to fame towards the end of last year, orphaned when their mother, Gina, died, have started the next step towards their rehabilitation back into the wild. Now nine months old, the male and two females were moved from a holding boma in the park’s main game viewing area to a much larger, 200 hectare camp within the Kuzuko contractual area in the north of the park.

Estimated to be weighing about 80kg each, they have the freedom to explore and start hunting small animals for themselves. “They will be closely monitored by Kuzuko management on a daily basis as it may be necessary to supplement their diet until such time that they are able to hunt on their own. It is estimated that they could spend between one and two years in the camp – before being released into the larger Kuzuko section,” says Addo’s Conservation Manager, John Adendorff.

The trio became a national news item in December when the park made a desperate plea for visitors to report any sightings of them after Gina died of a suspected snake bite and left them behind. They were last seen and photographed by a guest in mid-December – looking exceptionally thin and withered. Posted on Facebook, the photographs garnered widespread interest and concern, which saw people coming into the Park specifically to look for them and offering their services in the search. Local and national print and broadcast media also closely followed developments, appealing to visitors and prospective visitors to report any sightings to the Park’s conservation staff.

Long after park staff had given up hope after finding them alive following aerial searches, ranger patrols, follow-ups on numerous leads and eventually calling off the search, new light arose when a guide from one of the five star concessions alerted rangers that he may have spotted them on 10 January. Although sceptical, they still went out and miraculously found the three – albeit severely malnourished and lethargic. News of their survival travelled fast, as good news does, and turned what was a bleak start to the new year into one with renewed hope.

The cubs were darted and placed in a boma where they received immediate medical attention. They spent the last four months here, being regularly fed and bulking up for the next leg of their adventure at Kuzuko.
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
- The Receptionists were very polite and courteous as were all the staff we came into contact with. They all came across as efficient and aware of their responsibilities.
- The rondawels were very comfortable and the pick of all the places we’ve ever stayed in at Addo. The communal kitchen was clean, well-equipped and functional.
- The outlook over the waterhole and into the park was great.
- The park, the facilities and the staff were totally amazing! You guys make South Africa proud! Thank you.

Karoo National Park
- The accommodation and staff are all five star! We were delighted with the standard of care. The park is a credit to SANParks and to the image of state-run South African tourism.
- We want to compliment the staff for the way in which the park is managed. Everything was spotless, the roads were in good condition, the staff were friendly and the shop was well stocked. What a pleasure! A BIG thank you. You are an example of how it should be done.

Mountain Zebra National Park
- My friends and I were all very impressed with the standard of the service, the large number of beautiful animals, the accommodation, the roads, the swimming pools, picnic sites and the general overall quality of the environment of the park. All outstanding!
- Ons was werkelik meegevoer deur die wonderlike natuurskoon van die park asook die vriendelike en hartlike ontvangs wat ons beleef het van al die personeel met wie ons in kontak gekom het.
- Ons chalet en alles daarin was pragtig skoon en netjies. Dit is vir ons duidelik dat in hierdie park word hoë standaarde gehandhaaf en dinge word reg en deeglik gedoen.

Welcome to the Karoo family:
Receptionist, Patricia Sazela gave birth to healthy baby boy, Mbasa on 20 April. Congratulations to Patricia and her husband Jeffrey on the latest “wild” baby.

Samuel Tompies, previously from Augrabies National Park, who is the new Section Ranger. Samuel is joined by his wife, two sons and daughter. He is currently studying towards his National Diploma in Conservation.

There’s finally a thorn among the roses at Reception in the form of intern, Timothy Luiters.

SA College of Tourism student, Ellah Hlatshwayo, is another recent addition, and is proudly putting in extra effort to learn to speak Afrikaans.

Woody Cape’s flying Jojo tank
It must have been an interesting sight – it’s not every day you see a 10 000 litre Jojo tank being suspended from a helicopter. But that’s exactly what happened as one needed to be specially flown in to Addo’s Woody Cape Hut – the overnight accommodation along the two-day Alexandria Hiking Trail.

Previously the hut had a waterless (eco) toilet system, which was just that – it didn’t make use of water to flush. However, over the years, many guests failed to read the instructions and poured water into the toilet, which caused the system to break down, and which in turn necessitated constant maintenance.

Recently, though, the decision was made to replace it with regular toilets, making use of a Jojo tank for water supply. Rangers, general workers and Working for the Coast staff were involved in its construction and fitment. Because of its location, they had to haul rocks, needed for the support structure, from the park’s vehicles about three kilometres away, all the way to the hut, as well as all the other equipment. Some staff even slept over to speed up the process.

Karoo’s long service awards
Congratulations on achieving ten years of service with SANParks:

Jan Bezuidenhout
Katriena Booysen
Miena Esau
Loveness Dayimani
Sanet Olivier
Sorina van der Walt

Twenty-five years of service deserves special recognition. Well done:
The People and Conservation Department at Addo Elephant National Park in partnership with the Honorary Rangers organised a fence clean-up at the neighbouring Nomathamsanqa at the beginning of May. They roped in the assistance of community elders, ward councillors, rangers, field guides, other park staff, volunteers and teachers from four schools in the area to assist - Addo, AV Bukani and Vusumzi Primary Schools and Samkelwe High School. The group ended up being 65 people strong on the day.

In just two hours they filled over 60 refuse bags, enough to fill two bakkies to the brim. It is hoped that this joint effort will spur the community on to take ownership of their area and the park, and continue to look after both.

The day’s hard work was rewarded with a game drive in the park, followed by a wholesome lunch prepared by the Honorary Rangers.

A husband-and-wife Honorary Ranger (HR) team based at Table Mountain National Park, with a long-standing relationship with Cape Union Mart, have made it one of their lives’ missions to donate equipment to various national parks across the country. Addo Elephant and Karoo were at the receiving end recently.

Paul and Eileen van Helden added Addo to a planned holiday to Karoo and Mokala in May after Eileen won a national HR competition for three nights at any national park. To Karoo they donated spotlights for night game drives, flashlights, water bottles and backpacks, while Addo received spotlights, flashlights and trekking poles for mountain patrols. Paul and the park’s management usually agree on the needed items ahead of time, and this time round the couple personally bought some of the spotlights themselves.

The van Helden’s visit the parks not only for holidays, but as a way of getting the equipment to the staff there, as they find their biggest challenge is getting it to the respective parks. They have previously donated to Table Mountain, Namakwa, Richtersveld, Kruger, Aghulas, Tankwa, Karoo, Mountain Zebra and Addo Elephant.

They made quite a substantial donation to Karoo earlier this year, which was covered in the April edition of Frontier Times. Paul says, “I need to work more on Addo. I was so impressed by the park. We were lucky to get involved in lion darting and collaring with Dr Dave Zimmerman and John Adendorff while we were there, so I’d definitely love to make a return visit with some more equipment”.

It’s not every day one gets an invitation to be a VIP guest in parliament, so one can forgive Addo Receptionist, Lee-Marque Jansen for thinking it a prank when he first heard the news. He was invited by the Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom, to attend his budget vote speech in Cape Town in May. This came about thanks to Lee-Marque’s time on the Tourism Buddies hospitality programme, which empowers young people through on-the-job training.

“I asked them to send me an e-mail to confirm. I don’t think it really sank in until I got the official invitation from the office of the minister,” he says. He says his mother, who has always been his biggest supporter and motivator, was extremely proud of her only son.

The trip was Lee-Marque’s first visit to Cape Town, and it was also his first time flying. He couldn’t believe his luck, saying “It was amazing, from getting into my car in Cape Town to being dropped off at the airport again, I felt like royalty. It’s not every day you get to stay at one of Africa’s leading five star hotels – The Pepperclub Luxury Hotel and Spa.”

In Parliament, Lee-Marque was seated in the Old Assembly Chambers as a VIP guest, along with former Miss Earth South Africa, Catherine Constantinides. He says being witness to how discussions in parliament go, how people interact and go about making decisions was a real eye opener, and extremely educational and interesting.

Lee-Marque says some of the memories he’ll never forget about the trip is taking a selfie with the Minister and a bus tour of the city with entertainment provided by the local “Kaapse Klopse”.

The van Helden team, with the help of their friends and colleagues, has donated to a number of national parks across South Africa. They have donated to Table Mountain, Namakwa, Richtersveld, Kruger, Aghulas, Tankwa, Karoo, Mountain Zebra and Addo Elephant.

The couple believe that by donating equipment, they are helping to support the staff at these parks, and by doing so, they are also helping to protect the wildlife and natural habitats.

The van Helden team and their friends and colleagues continue to donate equipment to national parks across South Africa, and they hope to continue to make a positive impact in the conservation of our natural habitats.
Snake training

In last month's edition we covered the handing over of snake handling equipment from the Honorary Rangers in the Karoo to the park. As a result of the new equipment, staff members were given basic snake handling training and education by Addo Elephant National Park’s resident snake guru, Ryan Mew.

No practical training is possible without props, so Ryan took a number of his snakes along for the ride so staff could physically learn to work with their new equipment and the slithering creatures.

Welcome, winter!
Winter arrived in Mountain Zebra National Park on 5 June, with the first snow of the season

MZNP hosts the Cell C Take a Girl Child to Work Day

Every year Mountain Zebra National Park plays host to Cell C's Take a Girl Child to Work Day, and this year was no different. A total of 12 young girls from four high schools in Cradock spent the day in the park at the end of May, under the theme “Dream, Believe, Achieve”.

The purpose of the day, as always is to expose the girls to the different professional opportunities which exist in the organisation - careers which they may otherwise not have been given access to or have been educated about.

The girls, from JA Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Cradock and Michausdal High Schools, spent a productive day in the park where they did job shadowing in various departments such as Conservation, Tourism, People & Conservation, the Restaurant and Biodiversity Social Projects.

The programme included a powerful motivational talk by the Park Manager, Megan Taplin, who encouraged the girls to pursue a career in a field they are passionate about. “If you are passionate about your work, you will love your job and do well in your chosen career,” said Taplin. She also encouraged the girls to adopt the theme of the day ‘Dream, Believe, Achieve’ for the long term in all that they do, adding that positive thinking will help to achieve career goals. At the end of the day each girl received a certificate of participation and goody bags from Cell C.

Graaff-Reinet girls take to Camdeboo

Fifteen young girls from five high schools in Graaff-Reinet spent 28 May in Camdeboo National Park as part of the Cell C Take a Girl Child to Work Day. The park participates in this campaign annually, ensuring that young girls know which opportunities exist within SANParks.

The girls’ day started at the park’s Environmental Education Centre, where the People and Conservation staff enlightened them about their jobs, information on careers in conservation and practical environmental education activities. This was followed by a trip up to the Valley of Desolation for a light lunch at the viewing deck. They ended their day at the Valley Viewpoint, where they each received a certificate of participation.