Karoo lion finds a new home at Addo

Just over a week shy of the anniversary of his initial escape from Karoo National Park, and the lion which went on a second walk-about in March this year arrived safely at his new home in Addo Elephant National Park last week (27 May 2016).

The operation to move the lion began on Friday morning, where he was darted by a SANParks veterinarian in the Karoo boma where he’d been kept since his recapture, for his five-hour long road trip to Kuzuko. Once he was safely inside the Addo enclosure, the vet reversed the effects of the sedative and he was left to recover and explore his new surroundings.

Although the females were not in the immediate vicinity at the time, it didn’t take them long to find him and start getting acquainted from their individual sides of the fence.

Nicknamed “Sylvester” in the media, the three-and-a-half year old male was successfully relocated from Karoo National Park just outside Beaufort West to Addo Elephant National Park’s Kuzuko contractual area about two hours outside Port Elizabeth. He’ll be calling a boma within an existing 200ha enclosure (which houses two nearly two-year-old lionesses) home for the next few months. The hope is that over time, the three will bond and form their own pride, led by Sylvester.

The two lionesses have a long and interesting history of their own, having arrived at Kuzuko just over a year ago on 20 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.

They were last seen and photographed by a guest in mid-December of that year – looking thin and withered. Posted on social media, the photographs garnered widespread interest and concern, which saw people travelling to 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 of them after their mother died of a suspected snake bite.

It was believed that in the six weeks or so during which they weren’t seen, they were initially cared for by another female, Josie, who later had a litter of her own, whereafter they somehow survived on their own.

Long after park staff had given up hope of 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 alerted rangers that he may have spotted them on 10 January last year. Although sceptical, they still went out and miraculously found the cubs – albeit severely malnourished and lethargic. News of their survival traveled fast, as good news does, and turned what was a bleak start to the new year into one with renewed hope.

The cubs were placed in a boma where they received immediate medical attention. They spent four months here, before their move to Kuzuko, where they’ve been thriving ever since.

In the longer term, the three will be released into the park when the fence between Kuzuko and the neighbouring Darlington section of the park is dropped, which will provide them with 60 000ha over which to roam. Sylvester’s arrival in Addo brings to 19 the number of lions in the park.

Sylvester first escaped from Karoo National Park on 5 June last year, and managed to evade capture for over three weeks. He was then 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 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.

The decision to relocate the lion was one of several which were considered by SANParks, and was the one with the most benefits for the lion, as well as SANParks’ broader predator management programme.
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park

- I can recommend Simniwwe Nogee Nogaya, the hop-on guide. He’s a top man!
- Oms het al gebruik gemaak van ‘n hop-on guide en dit is verseker die meeste wert.

Camdeboo National Park

- Well done, SANParks. Another little gem – Camdeboo. Immaculately clean, lovely staff, communal kitchen (immaculate), communal braai area, private braai area.

Mountain Zebra National Park

- Dan really demonstrates and presents a complete package of professionalism in the field and a very acute knowledge of his subject matter. At all relevant times he treated us with sincere courtesy and went the proverbial extra mile to make our game drives with him as comfortable and as insightful as possible, taking time to explain the intricate and interesting biodiversity of not only MZNP and its fauna and flora but also generally as to the aims and goals of SANParks conservation in general. We are of the humblest sort of people in the world, and as such Dan holds and displays all the characteristics that prepare him for a long and successful career in conservation and scientific research. This level of professionalism, knowledge and enthusiasm in his chosen field of conservation should not go unrecognised. Dan is an asset to SANParks and we truly hope and trust that he will go through the ranks to become one of the top conservationists within SANParks and South Africa as he has the ability to do.
- This morning after a stunning early morning drive with you, Dan, we left for Eastern Cape again. All three tours we had the chance to be with you were amazing – the Park is very special as well, we virtually fell in love with it and we felt very well looked after, also by you, Jeanie.
- Mountain Zebra National Park has marvelous staff – one being Vuyani the other Donovan. What a pleasant visit! The Park is spick and span and run so well. My compliments to the staff there.
- This year we booked the first time for the Mountain Zebra Park, which was an exquisite experience. Looking forward to our next booking in 2017.
- Our three amazing nights at Mountain Zebra National Park are sadly drawing to an all too sudden end. If I had known, when I booked it, what I know now, our stay would have been twice the length, at a minimum. The astonishing, breathtaking views that no photo of mine will ever do justice, the quaint mountain cottage tucked away far from the real world, the fantastic 4x4 routes (that really are 4x4 routes) enraptured us completely. The tranquility of driving the wonderfully maintained roads, and just stopping, engine off, and gazing at the magnificent mountains for what seemed like an age, with no cars in sight, was soul food. The staff – from the friendly gatekeeper, to the reception staff, to the maintenance workers, to the shop and restaurant staff – was never below excellence. A standard has been set by the staff here that all other parks could learn from. Nothing was too much trouble, whether it be from charging my camera batteries, to finding me a tomato. I cannot highlight anyone in particular as they were ALL superb. Of course, the Fearsome Four lions copped off by our cottage for three days made the stay extra special. Seeing them chased by a black rhino was the icing on a very, very big cake. But removing them from by our cottage for three days made the stay extra special. Seeing them chased by a black rhino was the icing on a very, very big cake. But removing them from

MKNP at Karoo Food Festival

As part of the Karoo Food Festival which took place in Cradock at the beginning of May, the Mountain Zebra National Park Restaurant offered a venison spitbraai to patrons on the Saturday evening. It was open to those staying overnight in the Park and those coming in from town.

PARK Manager, Megan Taplin, said they had about 28 people for the spitbraai and that it was enjoyed by all, as well by those who were at the restaurant for their usual Sunday buffet. The restaurant also used spitbraai meat to sell on venison al-fresco pizzas at the MKNP/Mila’s stall the Food Festival in town over the weekend.

“Wild and wonderful” weekend awaits

South Africa’s leading family festival, the annual SPAR Kirkwood Wildsfees, promises a weekend of “Wild and Wonderful” experiences for the whole family.

From Friday June 24 to Sunday June 26 the Sundays River town of Kirkwood will be home to the first Zip Zap Circus performances in the Eastern Cape, pop group EDEN on stage in the province for the first time after the group got together again, while the youngsters have a wild time in their own festival-within-a-festival.

On the giant Windhoek stage will be an array of top South African artists playing late into the Karoo night.

“As far as we can tell we are the only major festival in South Africa to cater for the whole family. We consciously cater for all age groups. Thousands of people come for the day to shop at the more than 350 specialist stalls, to treat all five senses to wonderful experiences, and to enjoy the entertainment which is included in the entrance fee,” says festival director Jenni Honsbein.

There is also a serious business side to the festival, which hosts the Eastern Cape’s premier game auction, as well as the biggest agricultural show, the Unifrutti Agro Expo, and one of the biggest new vehicle expos in the country.

There is interest from around South Africa and neighbouring countries in the quality game that will go under the hammer at the annual game auction, which is the only sale in South Africa where breeders can purchase disease-free Addo buffalo directly from South African National Parks.

“Addo Elephant National Park and SANParks are proud to once again be associated with the SPAR Kirkwood Wildsfees,” says Park Manager, Mzwandile Mjadu.

“Our game capture went well, and this year we will be offering about 40 disease-free buffalo as well as prime eland and kudu at the auction. All funds raised through the sale of the animals will go towards park development and conservation-related expenses,” he says.

Hosted in the scenic Sundays River Valley less than an hour’s drive from Port Elizabeth, the Wildsfees is rated as one of the top festivals in South Africa – and one of the only festivals to cater for the whole family.

Other favourite attractions include the Walk on the Wildside experience, skaapkop langtafel, mohair expo and cooking demonstrations and simply chilling out in the Tiki Island Style Bar.
Kuzuko Lodge is situated in the Kuzuko Contractual Area of Addo Elephant National Park.

During the past couple of weeks one of their sub-adult elephant bulls broke away from the main herd and is now found alone, as is normal in elephant populations. Lodge management decided to name him “Mketeni”, after SANParks CEO, Fundisile Mketeni.

Other exciting news is that they recently discovered a newborn kudu carcass and were fortunate to photograph a brown hyena nearby. This is the first time, in the history of Kuzuko, that a brown hyena was seen in the area.

The two young lionesses, now roughly about 20 months old, are doing extremely well and surpassed everyone’s initial hopes of them learning to hunt on their own. Lodge management spends the absolute minimum time with them, they do not experience any staff on foot and feeding is done in a manner in which they will not associate feeding with vehicles – all of which is critical to their wellbeing.

During the past four months they started utilising the full extent of their 250ha enclosure and staff have seen them hunt and kill scrub hares, a rock monitor, vervet monkey, guinea fowl and kudu.

The J.A. Calata Secondary School in Cradock recently established an Environmental Club. And, due to a long-standing relationship it has with Mountain Zebra National Park, the two entities are working together closely on the initiative.

MZNP has agreed to equip and assist the club’s 21 members, made up of 20 learners and one educator, with all the necessary information and knowledge they need to help them achieve their vision of educating their community at large about the environment. The club aspires to be an example when it comes to preserving and conserving the environment, and while doing so, motivate society around them to also take care of their environment and benefit from doing so. They want to raise people’s awareness on how they are losing their biodiversity, how the human race is negatively contributing to drastic climate changes and they want to caution people about wasting natural resources.

The Environmental Club aims to instil values and principles in their school and community and to remind them that to Reduce, Re-use and Recycle are the first steps to a greater future where everyone will be living green by taking care of the environment.

To these ends the club’s members have already undergone two sessions in the Park. In April they were given an overview of SANParks, were informed more about the region and particularly Mountain Zebra National Park, the do’s and don’ts in a national park were explained to them and they ended off the session with a game drive. During May the group joined People and Conservation Office, Mxolisi Fulumente, on a hiking trail – where they were taught about plant identification and the biological importance of plants.

Karoo National Park’s People and Conservation Department is in the throes of their eighth Kids in Parks programme. Pictured here are learners from the Teske Primary School in Beaufort West exploring the area around the Environmental Education Centre.
Creative colouring leads to happy cycling

The Rhino Art Project, which aims to increase conservation awareness amongst the youth and cultivate a next generation of wildlife ‘ambassadors’ with a vested interest in the protection of rhino and other endangered species, recently teamed up with Mountain Zebra National Park and visited a number of schools in Cradock.

They had earlier given intermediate phase learners at four primary schools, Kude Kwalapha, Carinus, Michausdal and Zambodla, A3 rhino colouring-in sheets and crayons. They were tasked with colouring it in and offering messages of support in the fight against poaching – and the child with the best submission at each school would win a bicycle.

The educators at each of the schools had to work through all the artwork and select the top 10, from which the Rhino Art and MZNP representatives could simply select a winner at each school.

On the day, the visitors presented a session on conservation awareness at each of the schools, during which time the learners were educated about the importance of rhino and other species. Thereafter, the best colouring in accompanied by the best message of support was chosen as the winner, and the winning child was awarded a bicycle.

Melaney’s love of Marketing

From Tourism student, to People and Conservation officer, and now Marketing officer. No wonder Melaney Barrath says “Looking back, the pieces of the puzzle of my working life fit perfectly and I feel lucky to have experienced so much in such a short time with this organisation. I’ve now come full swing and feel so happy to be back home in the Tourism Marketing domain.”

Melaney started as the Marketing Officer for both the Garden Route and Frontier Regions at the beginning of May, and is based at the Knysna Regional Office.

She joined SANParks eight years ago in Wilderness, working mostly in Reception and Housekeeping. “As a tourism student I spent some time helping out at the BSP offices with the Working for Water (WW) and Working for the Coast Projects (WfC). Working with these projects and understanding the principles behind them really moved me and I decided to put my tourism career on hold in order to follow another passion of mine - community development,” says Melaney.

She spent two years managing the Wilderness WfC project before moving on to run People and Conservation in the Knysna area. “After eight years of working for the organisation and with local communities, my view on sustainable tourism has broadened and matured significantly and my passion for sustainable, nature based tourism marketing and development has only grown,”Mel says.

Karoo’s latest addition

Karoo National Park would like to welcome Nemcial Galant to the Park and especially to the Admin Department. Nemcial joined the park at the beginning of April as an intern and it didn’t take her long to find her feet in the department at all. We trust that Nemcial will gain good administrative experience during her internship, which will assist in her future career path.