South African National Parks continues to lead and gain ground in its rhino campaign efforts. A suspect arrested inside Karoo National Park outside Beaufort West in the Western Cape while allegedly attempting to poach rhino, was recently sentenced in the Cape Town Regional Court to five years’ imprisonment.

The incident took place on 30 August last year when three men from a rhino poaching syndicate in Limpopo province illegally entered the Park with the intention to kill a critically endangered black rhino for its horns. They gained entry by cutting a hole in the electrified game fence and tracked rhino spoor in an attempt to shoot one of the animals for its horns.

SANParks Field Rangers discovered the hole in the fence and tracked the spoor of the three suspects. One of the men, Alexandre Dias Shintlhangu was arrested, while the other two suspects fled the scene despite tracking conducted by SANParks Field Rangers, SAPS members and private landowners. A rifle fitted with a homemade silencer, 13 live rounds, a large axe and various other poaching equipment were recovered.

A case was opened in Beaufort West with the following charges: (1) Conspiracy to commit a crime by attempting to kill a black rhino (Diceros bicornis bicornis) in Karoo National Park. (2) Enter, reside and perform any activity (hunt) in a national park without the written permission of the management authority. (3) Possession of a firearm without holding a licence, permit or authorisation. (4) Possession of ammunition without holding a licence, permit or authorisation.

Shintlhangu’s bail application was successfully opposed and it was also discovered that at the time of his arrest in Karoo National Park he was out on bail on another case. During the investigation a second suspect was identified and arrested in Vaalwater.

On 31 May 2018, Shintlhangu entered into a plea and sentence agreement with the State in the Cape Town Regional Court. All charges against the second suspect were withdrawn pending DNA results.

Shintlhangu pled guilty to all four counts and was convicted and sentenced accordingly: Conspiracy to commit a crime by attempting to kill a black rhino (Diceros bicornis bicornis) in Karoo National Park - five years’ imprisonment. Enter, reside and perform any activity (hunt) in a national park without the written permission of the management authority - five years’ imprisonment. Possession of a firearm without holding a licence, permit or authorisation - five years’ imprisonment. Possession of ammunition without holding a licence, permit or authorisation – three years’ imprisonment. All four counts will run concurrently.
Compliments received

Addo Elephant and Garden Route National Parks
- My husband and I have spent time in Addo Elephant National Park as well as the Wilderness section of Garden Route National Park. What a pleasant experience! The staff were well trained, polite and extremely helpful. This points to excellent training. The units in which we stayed at Marysloveni and the Forest Cabins at Ebb and Flow were clean and comfortable. We tell all our friends about our positive experiences, and the news will spread! In this time of government bashing, SANParks can take a well-deserved bow.

Addo Elephant National Park
- I stay in the Park several times a year and have never ever found anything to fault the place. The staff and the pleasure of enjoying the Park, the accommodation, the shop, the toilets etc all kept up beautifully.
- Addo never disappoints. A bad day at Addo beats a good day anywhere else.

Camdeboo National Park
- The most beautiful park. Spectacular walks!
- Many thanks to Zimkhitha Zungula who taught us about food chains and habitats.

Garden Route National Park – Storms River Mouth
- The place to be. I love that place. Happy memories.
- I love this place.

Karoo National Park
- On behalf of my wife and me, I would like to compliment the hospitality staff at Karoo National Park for the efficient and professional manner in which they are operating the Park. We recently stayed in the camp ground for three nights and in a chalet for a further three nights a week later. Last minute changes (by us) were very well handled by Patricia, with full support from the Duty Manager. Thank you.
- I love this place!
- Always a great place to stay.

Mountain Zebra National Park
- For sure my favourite Park!
- Good for the soul.
- Like many, MZNP is our favourite park and we have been there many times. It has something special about it that you only understand once you’ve been. We are so looking forward to the trip in July and hopefully catching up with the lions that were recently relocated from Addo and the other amazing sights.

Annual SANParks Photo Competition
The South African National Parks’ 2018 Kudu Awards in partnership with First National Bank (FNB) and Total SA has opened entries for the 14th annual awards.

SANParks’ Head of Communications, Janine Raftopoulos says, “Conservation, cultural heritage and giving back is now more important than ever before, and the Kudu Awards is an event whereby SANParks honours and celebrates people whose conservation efforts and national pride are exemplary.”

According to Raftopoulos, entering the awards programme holds tangible benefits and financial rewards for entrants. “Finalists and winners receive exposure and peer recognition by being associated with these prestigious awards,” Why not show the world what you have done and encourage others to follow in your footsteps.

The awards consist of the following categories:
- Corporate
- Non-Governmental Organisations
- Media Contribution to Conservation and Eco-Tourism
- Community Contribution to Conservation
- Environmental Education
- Individual Contribution to Conservation
- Professional Stakeholders
- Associated Partners
- Women in Conservation
- Innovation

The closing date for entries is 15 July 2018. The award winners will be announced at a gala function to be held in Gauteng in October.

For more information or to enter, visit: https://www.sanparks.org/about/events/kudu_awards/
Since February 2018 quite a few fires have been burning and smoldering to the north-west and north of Knysna. These were, and still are, controlled burns done by SANParks and stack-burning by the forestry company, MTO (Mountain to Ocean). The community rightfully worries as smoke has been seen continuously since February when the first block burn was started in Millwood (Goudveld) and again from April when the second ecological block burn was done.

SANParks - Garden Route National Park (GRNP) is in the process of receiving clear felled plantation land back from MTO that manages state forest land that has been under pine plantations for close to 90 years. Many of the areas that are handed over to SANParks were never planted and are mostly old fynbos. The first land was transferred to GRNP in 2012. SANParks refers to these areas as ‘exit areas’.

The majority of the land is rehabilitated back to fynbos, but some forest areas are received back and a small percentage of the land naturally reverts to forest. Forest often ‘invades’ fynbos but natural fire patterns will ultimately reclaim the land for fynbos. This means that fynbos areas cannot realistically be converted to forest. Fynbos is a fire driven biome; fire rejuvenates fynbos and mountain fynbos is fully adapted to burn on an optimal cycle of nine to 25 years old. Fynbos’ reproduction system is adapted for fire in that many species rejuvenate by coppicing (traditional method of woodland management which takes advantage of the fact that many trees make new growth from the stump or roots if cut down) and others regrow from seed that may be stored on the plant and released after fire, or in the soil, and even carried by ants and stored in soil to germinate after fire.

SANParks received the clear felled areas in large ‘geo-units’, often in excess of 1 000ha. This may consist of recently cleared plantation and natural, and often old, fynbos. The ‘exit areas’ rehabilitate spontaneously to fynbos and exceeds expectations to an extent we could not imagine. Two ‘immediate’ actions in the rehabilitation process are however needed. The first is alien plant control and the second is to burn areas where fynbos is too old or where burning is needed for access to control aliens, or to kill young pine infestation or where large areas of the indigenous, but invasive coral fern (‘kystervaring’ in Afrikaans or Gleichenia polypodioides) occur. These are the areas that are currently burned.

The controlled burns are a joint operation between SANParks, the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association and Working on Fire. Although National Park land, the area may not be burnt without a permit from the Knysna Municipality fire chief. The fire chief can retract the permit if weather is not suitable, i.e. dangerous, in his opinion. All possible precautionary measures are in place prior to the burn. This includes aerial support and ground crew. Numerous institutions are placed on standby to assist when needed.

Fynbos burns naturally when it has accumulated enough fuel to burn, when it is dry enough and when the temperature is hot enough. Wind greatly assists in burning. The first block burn (Millwood – 160ha) got underway on 27 February after a very long planning period to get legal and procurement issues in place (contracts and payment) as well as the logistics that go into burning, including synchronising three partners and preparing fire belts. The fire was only lit after 10am when the fynbos dried off somewhat from the previous night’s dew. The burn went well but some areas did not burn clean due to the vegetation being too wet and the weather not hot enough.

Fynbos can occasionally burn too hot and mostly only occurs when it is infested by aliens or when cleared aliens are stacked before burning, etc. The second block burn was started on 18 April in cooler weather. Many areas burnt well but in some areas it did not achieve its ecological objectives. As the weather conditions were too cool for complete consumption of the fuel (fynbos vegetation) and the Southern Cape being in a dry spell, i.e., not receiving much rain, the fires keep smoldering in deep vegetation that is impenetrable and unsafe to eradicate a fire in. Due to cost and no threat to anyone’s immediate safety, the fire will only be eradicated by rain. The status of the fire is contained and is between the Lawnwood forest and Van Loggerenbergbos, in Goudveld. Indigenous forests form a natural fire break between mountain fynbos and farms south of GRNP that replaced lowland fynbos. By burning blocks, that reduces fynbos’ fuel load, and therefore flammability, large firebreaks are formed that will potentially protect communities from inevitable lightning-induced fires in the Outeniqua mountains, while managing fynbos in a way nature intended.
World Oceans Day

World Oceans Day on 8 June is a global campaign to encourage all citizens to act against pollution in a bid to protect the oceans. SANParks’ concern is its estuaries which open to the ocean, therefore the slogan “By acting against land-based pollution, we prevent it from reaching the estuaries and going out to sea.”

Knysna’s People & Conservation Officer, Ndumi Mgwenya, says this year’s efforts to raise awareness in the town about World Oceans Week included visits to the Sedgefield shopping centre, Plettenberg Bay Kwa-Nokuthula Library, Kranshoek community sports field, Community library in White Location and KET Model Creche in Khayalethu to share information about biodiversity in the oceans. Mgwenya says communities were amazed at the career opportunities in the ocean.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, 73% of litter in our freshwater systems and oceans is non-biodegradable plastic.

There are ongoing campaigns to clean areas around the estuaries and beaches spearheaded by civil society, SANParks Honorary Rangers and others, which residents are encouraged to join when advertised or initiate their own and share with the P&C departments in Wilderness, Knysna and Tsitsikamma.

Tsitsikamma Junior Rangers

Tsitsikamma’s Junior Rangers programme started in April this year and is facilitated by Honorary Rangers Anette Benniman and Johan Schlechter with the assistance of the section’s People and Conservation Officer, Nobulumko Gantsho.

The programme is made up of 30 Grade 10 learners from local schools. During the first session of the Programme, Gantsho gave an overview of the Tsitsikamma section of Garden Route National Park. The Park is home to Africa’s oldest Marine Protected Area (MPA). It also has indigenous coastal forest areas and patches of fynbos. A total of 202 species of fish, sharks and rays from 84 families have been recorded in the Tsitsikamma MPA alone. Fifteen of these species can be found on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red data list as either vulnerable or near threatened whilst many other fish species protected in the MPA are classified as over-exploited or collapsed in South Africa.

Junior Rangers got to experience the diversity in Tsitsikamma by walking the first part of the 50-year old Otter hiking trail (which is 10km long).

Many hands make light work

Addo’s People and Conservation office has had a busy few weeks. Together with the Park’s Biodiversity Social Projects teams, they assisted St Colmcilles High School in Kirkwood with the removal of alien plants in the school yard, the planting of spekboom and moving a cycad on the property.

On 24 May the Park hosted 50 female learners from Samkelwe and Moses Mabhida Secondary Schools on the Cell C Take a girl child to work programme. The aim of this initiative is to help girls explore work and professional opportunities which they might not have access to or knowledge of. It is a practical step towards enabling them to make the connection between what they learn at school and their future careers goals. Many thanks to Kirkwood Spar who sponsored the group with meal packs.

The collaboration with the Cat Conservation Trust continues. One of the schools visited recently was Sunlands Primary School. During the session learners are taught about the different types of cats and the significant role they play in balancing the ecosystem.

Addo lends a helping hand to its communities

The SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Addo region held a fence clean up and repair work party on 16 June to assist the on-duty Honorary Rangers along the Woodlands fence where a truck damaged the inside trip wire and spikes due to overgrown bushes obstructing the road.

Nine Honorary Rangers participated, clearing a 200m long section of road of overgrown thorn trees. Thanks to their efforts, the Woodlands fence road is now again passable.

Added to this, some of the electrical fence strand readings along a section of fence were found to be bouncing. The problem was eventually traced to a faulty earth connection at the energiser; repaired and in good and constant order again thereafter.
Congratulations to all the colleagues from the Frontier Region who graduated from the Wits Business School on the much anticipated Management Leadership Development Programme recently.

They were Bulelwa Msengi (Area Manager: Tsitsikamma section of Garden Route National Park), Andile Nambu (Manager: Business Development), Esther Truter (Administration and Finance Manager: Frontier Region) and Roland Januarie (Park Manager: Mountain Zebra National Park).

The programme was aimed at capacitating Managers in areas of personal effectiveness, emotional intelligence, teams and leadership, business insight analytical skills, decision making, people and change management, accounting and finance, strategic management, communication skills and service management.

The management and staff of Garden Route National Park - Tsitsikamma Section - would like to convey their sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family of the late Evelyn Koli, who worked in the Park’s hospitality department.

May her family rest assured in the knowledge she lived a full life and is safe in the arms of the Almighty.

Our prayers are with you.

Great Zuurberg Trek 2018

The annual PWC Great Zuurberg Trek took place in and around the Zuurberg section of Addo Elephant National Park at the end of May.

The Park’s very own Finance and Administration Manager, Esther Truter and her husband Duane participated as the Park’s entries again this year.

The organisers of the event thanked Senior section ranger, Zelna Breytenbach, who they’ve dubbed a GZT ambassador, by giving her a dung beetle trophy – for all her hard work (just like the Park’s hardworking dung beetles) over the years.

Tsitsikamma Women’s Forum

Condolences

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