Guests to parks, camping and activity figures up

Addo Elephant, Camdeboo, Karoo and Mountain Zebra National Parks, which make up the Frontier Region of South African National Parks (SANParks), contributed to increased statistics in guests to parks, camping and activities booked over the last financial year (April 2015 to March 2016).

The biggest increase noted in the region was that of visiting guests – up by 11.9% from 305 251 over 2014/15 to 341 482 during 2015/16. Addo Elephant National Park, the largest national park in the area, welcomed 231 464 guests through its gates during this time, up from 204 881 previously. This made Addo the fifth most visited national park.

Camping also increased in popularity, with a regional growth of 11.2% in site nights sold – from 21 098 to 23 470. Karoo National Park just outside Beaufort West tallied a nearly 15% increase in site nights sold, from 5 661 to 6 503. Addo topped the national list of parks with the highest camp site occupancy with 82.3%. Karoo National Park ranked fourth with 68.3%.

Regionally, the number of activities sold went up by 7.3%, from 31 547 to 33 835. Addo’s various activities (guided game drives, horse trails, a 4x4 route, walking and hiking trails) accounted for the majority of these – 30 117 from 27 680 previously, an increase of nearly 9%. Nationally, Addo Main Camp topped the list of camps with the highest activities per 100 overnight guests – at 39.8, well ahead of second place with 21.9.

Local visitors to parks were exactly double that of overseas guests – accounting for 66.5% of entries (227 255 over the 113 355 international visitors). Guests from the top five countries to the region were Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States and France. Overall, day visitors accounted for 75% of arrivals, with only 25% of guests to parks overnighting.
Compliments received

We have recently completed a Caravaning Tour, being 14 caravans, during late February and early March. We visited and overnighted at Mountain Zebra National Park, Camdeboo Rest Camp and Addo Rest Camp, staying for a combined total of nine nights. We would like to record and express our appreciation of the very good service standards we were afforded - from the satellite office at The Boardwalk, Port Elizabeth, to the individual staff members at the various Parks, who all offered assistance and support with our arrangements:

- Jeanie Botha and Khayalethu Lamani at Mountain Zebra National Park;
- Booi Smith, Demi and Nonwazi at Cambedoo (and I apologise if I have spelt a name incorrectly);
- Lee-Marque Jansen, Caitlin Rensburg and Vuyo Ndulama at Addo;
- A special thanks also goes to Freedom Maxhego, Manager of the Cattle Baron Restaurant at Addo, for his support and co-operation.

Addo Elephant National Park

- A big compliment to the young lady at the entrance of the game area at main camp, who’s doing her job with such joy and enthusiasm! One morning she greeted me with a “Good morning, madam, how are you? I have exiting news for you. The lions were seen in the southern part. If you give me your map I’ll show you where.” Well, it was next to Arizona Dam and we saw them. This lady made our day!!!
- All the attractions are not only in the bush. All the news and history of the park is very interesting too. Fantastic park!
- The best park to view and get close to the ellies.
- A great weekend! Just can’t get enough of Addo. A bad day at Addo beats 20 good days at work.

Camdeboo National Park

- All hail CNP staff for their professionalism.
- Back from a great weekend at Camdeboo National Park.
- Amazing place with great service and wonderful for the soul.

Karoo National Park

- There is no silence like the silence in Karoo National Park.
- My en my gesin se “happy place”.
- Wow! Saw our first lion today. She was hunting. Could see her stalking. She kept herself hidden in the little rivine. After a while we could not see her again. Waited for a long time, but we did not see her again.

Mountain Zebra National Park

- Wow! We had one awesome weekend in MZNP! Despite the cold nights we enjoyed the camping, especially being woken up by the lions roaring just outside camp on Saturday morning.
- We went birding, but we had some wonderful mammal sightings to add as a bonus. We will be back!!
- Een van my hartsplekke op aarde.
- We spent two nights in the Mountain Zebra National Park with the family. No doubt this is one of the most beautiful parks in our country.
- What a treat spending two nights in this pristine and well-maintained park!
- Mountain Zebra National Park is my favourite. Neat, well looked after, very friendly!
- On a recent visit to Mountain Zebra I had the wonderful luck of finding all four lions feasting on a kill just off the road on the Roopiplaat loop. It was early morning and there were only three cars. What a wonderful experience.
- Absolutely my most favourite park!

Karoo’s Junior Rangers get “ant-wise” with limbovane

Ants play important roles in ecosystems, yet they often go unnoticed. To raise awareness of the importance and diversity of these tiny insects, the limbovane Outreach Project* presented a training session for SANParks Junior Rangers in the Karoo National Park recently.

The limbovane Outreach Project has been monitoring the ant diversity of the Karoo National Park since 2006. To-date, the project has identified approximately 63 morphospecies in the Park, many of which are important for the seed dispersal of indigenous plant species, the breakdown of organic material, soil turnover and nutrient recycling. *Iimbovane is both a science outreach and long-term biodiversity monitoring project supported by the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology and based at Stellenbosch University. The long-term monitoring component of the project examines ant diversity through space and time. Educators and learners from secondary schools throughout the Western Cape assist Iimbovane with the monitoring through participation in on-site sampling.

Cheryl Momberg, Trade Admin Officer at Addo Elephant National Park for the past 16 years, and SANParks employee for more than double that (33 years of service), retired at the end of April.

She started her career at Golden Gate Highlands National Park in July 1983 as a Receptionist and also did duty as relief staff in tourism when necessary (shop, restaurant, housekeeping). While there, she studied towards her diploma in Nature Conservation. A pregnant Cheryl, her husband (Dawid Momberg – Addo Hospitality Services Manager) and their eldest son were transferred to Augrabies Falls National Park in 1992, where she worked as Shop manager and Admin Officer.

The family of four then transferred to Addo in 2000, where they’ve been ever since. Cheryl says, “As a family we have been privileged to work and live in some beautiful Parks and enjoy the life that living in a rest camp has offered. It has been a privilege to work for SANParks and live in the different national parks as conservation has been a lifelong passion.”

We wish Cheryl all the best that retired life has to offer!

Happy retirement!
Camdeboo winning the fight against alien invasive species

The release of an addition to Camdeboo National Park’s insect family towards the end of 2015 is starting to show results. The project is being jointly run by Rhodes University in Grahamstown, the park and its Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP). The purpose is to aid in the fight against an alien invasive species which is threatening the biodiversity of the park.

*Solanum elaeagnifolium*, commonly known as satansbos or silverleaf nightshade, is a perennial plant with extensive root systems which can extend to three metres deep and two metres horizontally, with an aerial growth of about 60cm. This alien species commonly occurs on disturbed farmlands or along road verges. Herbicides can be used but is only effective during the flowering cycle of the plant.

Rhodes University released 9,000 *Leptinotarsa texana*, or satansbos leaf beetle, in the game viewing area and around the Gannaleegte gate in December last year. This biocontrol agent is indigenous to North America, is dome shaped and is about eight millimetres in diameter. These little insects are pale yellow with black stripes along the front wings.

Signs of its success in the park are already visible – with plants along the banks of the Sundays River losing leaves and starting to die.

The monitoring of the satansbos leaf beetles is of high importance as it will have a direct impact on the control of the satansbos, leading to adaptive management and further implementation – not only in national parks, but possibly to their neighbours too.

With new initiatives and strategies like these, BSP will continue to work towards saving and protecting our biodiversity, even if this comes in the shape of small, beetle-sized packages.