A new female cheetah was released into Mountain Zebra National Park on 12 August – introducing new genes into the park in the process.

The four-year-old female arrived in the Park from the Dinokeng Game Reserve in Gauteng on Wednesday 15 July. She had been in a boma since, acclimatising to the area before her release. She was also fitted with a tracking collar so that park management can monitor her movements and her interaction with other animals.

“The new cheetah represents a valuable addition to our cheetah population in the Park, as she brings a new mix of genes which will improve genetic health,” said Park Manager, Megan Taplin.

Her introduction is part of the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s (EWT) Cheetah Metapopulation Project. Established in 2011, it is a co-ordinated approach for the management of about 300 cheetah in over 50 reserves across the country. Project co-ordinator, Vincent van der Merwe, says a managed population is a set of geographically isolated populations of the same species that exchange individuals through human-controlled movement. Fenced metapopulations need to be managed to prevent the undesired effects of inbreeding. The project is a collaborative effort between all cheetah reserves in South Africa, co-ordinated by the EWT and funded by National Geographic, St Louis Zoo, Columbus Zoo, Scoville Zoo and generous donations.

“Over the past eight years, Mountain Zebra National Park has been the biggest contributor to the country’s metapopulation, making 24 of their cheetah available. During this time, park management has only requested two cheetah from the project in order to alleviate genetic concerns,” says van der Merwe.

Mountain Zebra National Park first introduced cheetah into the Park in July 2007 – two males and two females. Over the next three years, the Park’s cheetah population rose to 33. To prevent in-breeding, sub-adult cheetah as well as some cheetah females with their cubs were captured and relocated to other reserves across South Africa. The latest release brings to eight the number of cheetah currently in the Park. Taplin said that the new female would not be contracepted in the hope that any cubs she might produce would be moved to other national parks and game reserves in the future to boost cheetah metapopulation numbers.

Female cheetah have been allowed to breed in the past two years to ensure that any effect of predation by lions – which are known to kill cheetah to reduce competition for prey – is mitigated. “This new female has been able to rear a litter of cubs successfully in the presence of other predators including lion in her previous home, so we hope that she will be able to do so once again in Mountain Zebra National Park,” Taplin continued.

Mountain Zebra National Park will be providing a sub-adult female cheetah to Dinokeng Game Reserve in the next few months, once capture is possible, as part of their ongoing involvement in the EWT cheetah project.
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
• Lovely and peaceful visit. 10 out of 10. Thank you.
• The staff were very friendly and efficient at Cattle Baron.
• Your staff are amazing and so helpful. I had wanted to get another chalet for my parents who were accompanying us (a last minute arrangement) but all your units were full. Your staff were amazing in bringing additional mattresses and bedding to the chalet.
We are most grateful.

Karoo National Park
• The scenery is really stunning!
• We thoroughly enjoyed the morning walk with ranger Gregory, despite the degree C temperature. He was very knowledgeable on the flora and mammals and conveyed a sense of real passion for the Park.
• Sitting in the beautiful restaurant at Karoo National Park and really: What a Park! I want to highly commend the staff and say thank you for such a welcoming upon our arrival. We have never experienced this kind of service and friendliness anywhere else.

Mountain Zebra National Park
• Thank you for a very pleasant stay in your Park. As on previous occasions, I thoroughly enjoyed the very short time I had there.
• All the best to you and your staff and keep up the great work you are all doing!

Karoo Junior Rangers go frogging!

Did you know that the Western Leopard Toad is confined to Cape Town and the Agulhas Plain? And more interestingly, did you know that they only mate between two and five nights a year during August?

Karoo National Park’s Junior Rangers visited Table Mountain National Park for a weekend of “frogging” during August. Their programme included an information session about frog research done by Dr. John Measey, a Senior Researcher at the Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology at the University of Stellenbosch.

Not only did they go on a mission to see and learn new things, but also to act as protectors of this very sacred time in the life of the Western Leopard Toad.

Every year, for a period of less than a week, toady goes a-courting. During this time, thousands of toads migrate to suitable ponds, where males fight it out for the females’ attention and affection. After mating, the females lay their eggs and depart, migrating back home. Once the exhausted males realise that no further females are making their way to the ponds, they also return to their respective gardens.

The problem with sharing a city with millions of Capetonians, however, is that roads have been built all around their breeding ponds. So the very real threat, year after year, exists that thousands of toads may be potentially pancaked over these few days.

Fortunately, there are volunteers who man the roads, control traffic and rescue these toads every August. Even though the frenzy lasts for only two to five nights a year, in that time the next generation of toads can either be created or doomed.

Accompanied by the Park’s Senior People and Conservation Officer, Esna van Zyl, the Junior Rangers acted as some of these volunteers during their trip, during which time they had the amazing opportunity to see the little toads in the natural habitat.

Gina’s cubs thriving at Kuzuko

It’s hard to believe that it’s already been five months since Gina’s cubs were moved from Addo’s Main Camp to the Kuzuko contractual area of the park.

Assistant General Manager, Catharina de Lange, says while they spent their first two months there occupying the area furthest from the two big males, they recently started exploring their area more. The cubs are safely housed in a 200ha camp, with the males not having been seen anywhere close to the area yet.

Staff have observed that while feeding, their natural hunting instincts are seemingly kicking in, as they are often seen suffocating the carcass before feeding. They feed well and finish entire carcasses without wasting anything.

A feeding slide has been constructed from where their food is now being delivered from outside their camp. This has been done so that they do not associate food with vehicles or people.

Catharina says, “We are confident in their rehabilitation and they are showing all the right signs. Again we must thank South African National Parks for the opportunity they gave us in the rehabilitation of these cubs.”

Empowering our leaders of tomorrow

Addo Elephant National Park partnered in the Sarah Baartman District Municipality’s Youth Month Dialogue/Camp over the weekend of 11 August. Organised by the Department of Social Development, representatives from the nine local municipalities came together to discuss a range of topical issues.

The purpose of the camp was to build the youths’ consciousness on their role in post-apartheid South Africa and to mobilise them to be agents of change within their own communities in an effort to promote nation building and social cohesion. Volkswagen Group South Africa as well as Ushas Trust NPO participated in the programme.

Addo’s involvement culminated in a beach walk for the 45 youth and 20 adults, where Marine Senior Section Ranger Roget Fox spoke to the group about the importance of the area and its biodiversity. He was accompanied by People and Conservation’s Nondumiso Mgwenya and conservation student, Trevor Coetzee.

Kids in Parks participants wax lyrical on GamkaFM

Karoo National Park’s People and Conservation Department staff took five learners from different schools to Beaufort West’s local radio station recently so they could chat about their experiences on the Kids in Parks (KiP) programme.

The Park has a monthly slot on GamkaFM where they discuss topical issues on-air.

This year, the park hosted 498 learners and 31 educators on the KiP programme. Marius Meyer, who is both the manager of the station as well as a DJ, hosted an entertaining show with the learners as they told of their time on only one of SANParks’ many environmental education campaigns.

It was the first time all of the youngsters spoke on radio and they all enjoyed it thoroughly. The participants were: Maxwell Lukas (J.D. Crawford Primary School), Renaldo Badenhorst (Beaufort West Primary School), Clinton Loots (A.H Barnard Primary School), Jadine Knecht (Teske Gedenk Primary School) and Thahira Stemmet (H.M Dlikidla Primary School).
A few editions back we reported on the generous donations made to Addo Elephant National Park by Table Mountain National Park Honorary Rangers, Paul and Eileen van Helden.

Some of the items they secured from sponsors like Cape Union Mart were items of clothing. Conservation Manager, John Adendorff, recently handed over K-Way jackets to the Darlington rangers, who make up a small, yet dedicated team conserving our precious resources in the north of the park, where it’s been known to get bitterly cold.

Senior Section Ranger, Ilse Welgemoed, says the gesture has gone a long way to motivate her team to carry on giving of their best.

Celebrating the world’s elephants and lions

World Elephant Day (12 August) and World Lion Day (10 August) are two events celebrated annually. This year, Addo’s People and Conservation Officer, Nondumiso Mgwenya, travelled to Shamwari Private Game Reserve to attend a multi-sectoral workshop on the occasions on 22 August.

The aim was to raise awareness of poaching and the impacts humans have on the environment, as well reminding eco-schools educators about the importance of educating learners about the importance of biodiversity.

The event was coordinated by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA). Participants included representatives from WESSA, AENP, Shamwari Game Reserve, Coca Cola and eco-schools.

Presentations focused on topics such as biodiversity, the effects of taming wild lions as well as informative talks on lions and elephants.

Women’s Day

Addo Elephant National Park
Female staff members at Addo Elephant National Park were treated to a Women’s Day event sponsored by cosmetic brand, Avon, this year. The event took place in the Park’s lapa and was jointly organised by the Admin, Tourism and People and Conservation (P&C) staff as a way of thanking and honouring the ladies for their hard work in ensuring that the Park runs smoothly and efficiently.

Motivational and informative talks were given to the women by a local female Ward Councillor and the Avon representative, who brought along a number of pampering hampers and gifts for some of the lucky ladies.

Karoo National Park
Karoo National Park’s theme this year was “women’s health”, with the Department of Health’s (DoH) Sister Rosalien Jonkers as the guest speaker. She addressed the women on the subjects of breast and cervical cancer, as well as contraception, stressing the importance of early diagnosis and the prevention of unplanned pregnancies.

Senior People and Conservation Officer, Esna van Zyl, also offered a short talk on fetal alcohol syndrome. Thereafter the women were afforded the opportunity to make appointments at their local clinic as well as look through and take home some informative reading material.

Mountain Zebra National Park
Park Manager, Megan Taplin, along with two DoH representatives, hosted members of the Park’s fairer sex to a session geared to empower them on social and health issues. The DoH representatives stressed the importance of breast self-examination and going for regular health testing – stressing that early detection of a number of diseases is key. They also emphasised the need for healthy living, including balance diets, limiting alcohol intake and regular exercise.

Megan ended off the session, saying, “Thank you for all the good work you do in Mountain Zebra National Park. I ask you to continue to be courageous, strong women and continue to build your family, your community, your workforce and your nation of South Africa.”
Congratulations!

Karoo National Park Management and staff would like to congratulate Jan “Jotty” Bezuidenhout on his promotional appointment as Driver/General worker. Jotty has been with SANParks for more than ten years and his colleagues are very proud and happy for him!

The cycads recovered from an alleged poaching syndicate near Addo Elephant National Park earlier this year are doing well. Zuurberg senior section ranger, Zelna Breytenbach, says all are still standing and seem to be anchored well into the ground. Most of the cones that pushed out have aborted their seed and the leaves have dropped as well.

She and her staff have put a layer of sweet thorn around the base of the cycad stem, after noticing some damage around the base and a few marks higher up. They suspect it could be ystervark causing the damage around the base as they do the same to some other species, and although less certain about the marks higher up, they say it could be baboon or even mongoose.

The cycads, worth an estimated R2 million, were illegally removed from a property adjacent to the Park in March, allegedly to be sold on the black market.

The case goes to trial again on 5 October.

The Kabouga River is an intermittent freshwater stream that lies in the Kabouga Section of Addo Elephant National Park. It flows between the beautiful, rugged mountains and into the great Sundays River. It’s been dry for the past five years, but abundant rainfall over the past few months have left it flowing strongly again. This offers a majestic sense of place for guests who visit the section – as they now cross numerous streams while on the 4x4 trail, with the soothing sounds of the flowing water offering total serenity.

Addo’s rehabilitated cycads flourishing

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