Foam Party?

Foam party or natural foam? ‘ It is sea foam which is created through the agitation of decomposing organic matter (proteins etc.) in the water column. These compounds can act as foaming agents and wave action helps to “aerate” the water and bubbles are formed which then stick to each other through surface tension. The more organic matter in the water and the more turbulent the condition the more foam you will have’ Kyle Smith.
Molweni GRNPers

The beginning of every new -year is normally a time for resolutions, new hopes, determination and walking around with a fresh lease on life. And whilst this is true for the Garden Route National Park (GRNP), it has also become a time for reflection over the past year. 2014 was not only the year which marked twenty years in South Africa’s young democracy, it also marked the 50th year of successful management of the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area (MPA).

After 50 years it was time for the GRNP to do some introspection in terms of its relevance in today’s much changed society. How does the GRNP contribute towards the SANParks’ vision of “Connecting Society”? Fiscally, the park did remarkably well, with an increase of income 22 % just over this last year and an operational budget within 1% of forecast. An increase in visitors of 19% and notably in black visitor numbers of 11,4% revealed improved stakeholder relations and successful outreach programmes with local government structures and neighbouring communities. Local government departments are increasingly using the park’s many attractions and accommodation options as a base for important workshops. Local events companies use the rest camps as event villages for activities such as the world-renowned Otter Trail run, Merell Eden Duo, Southern Storm and the Outeniqua challenge amongst many.

During the launch of the SANParks week, the Honourable Minister of Arts and Culture, Ms. Rejoice Mabudafasi said: “Our National Development Framework (NDP) aims to ensure a decent standard of living through the elimination of poverty and reduction of inequality. The core of a decent living standard contains amongst other areas that the Department of Environmental Affairs (SANParks) deals with directly are: Housing, water, electricity and sanitation; Quality of education and skills development; Social protection; Employment; Recreation and leisure and a clean environment. In Connecting Society, the vision of SANParks, as well as effectively managing our mountain catchment areas, rivers and river mouths, estuaries, wetlands, and associated alien clearing programme, the Garden Route National Park makes a significant contribution towards providing clean water to the towns of Wilderness, Sedgefield and Knysna. Via the extensive Biodiversity Social Programme (BSP) the Park currently provides employment to 1200 people and this programme also provides various skills development to the beneficiaries. Apart from the municipalities, the GRNP is the biggest employer, with permanent and contract staff, providing 324 permanent jobs and some additional 150 jobs via concessionaires. A Training Plan ensures that staff and contractors are trained and developed to perform their jobs optimally.

The Honourable Tourism Minister, Derec Hanekom visited the park on two occasions, one to open the Blue Flag Beach* season as well as the declaration of the Knysna Estuary, the top estuary in terms of biodiversity value, as an International Hope Spot, showing a clear commitment from government to support all the conservation initiatives.

Colleagues and stakeholders, while an increase in all above indicators is excellent, we must remain dedicated and stay the path. Have a fabulous 2015!

Jill Bunding-Venter
General Manager: Garden Route National Park
Wetlands purify and replenish our water, and provide the fish and rice that feed billions. They also act as a natural sponge against flooding and drought, protecting our coastlines. They burst with biodiversity, and are a vital means of storing carbon. This year’s International theme for the World Wetlands Day campaign is ‘Wetlands for our future-join us’ calling for more action to conserve wetlands.

A water bird census conducted this year in Kuwait as part of raising awareness about wetlands, revealed there were about 66,000 birds in that country alone.

The South African Government has pleaded with citizens to turn the tide on the loss and degradation of wetlands. At least 64% of wetlands have disappeared since 1900.

The African Oystercatcher is regarded as ‘Near threatened’ in the IUCN’s red data list. There are between 5000 and 6000 of these left, requiring urgent conservation action.’ This bird feeds on mussels, insects, fish and other. It can live up to 35 years and spends 25 with a partner. Oystercatchers like 32 fish species and 285 indigenous plant species live and thrive in wetlands.

The Ramsar site in Wilderness is also part of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). This globally significant site is made up of Eilandvlei, Langvlei and Rondevlei interconnected lakes joining the Touw River. They are home to a variety of aquatic species. The Wilderness Lakes system is a series of three (3) permanent, interconnected coastal lakes linked to the Indian Ocean and includes a dune system with associated thickets, woodlands, marshes, and reedbeds. Important locally-migrant resident birds as well as staging and breeding birds use the site.

Inland wetland types:
Marshes, ponds, lakes, fens, rivers, flood plains and swamps

Coastal wetlands include saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons & even reefs

Global scientific studies show 64% of the world’s wetlands have disappeared since 1900.

Wetlands help purify & replenish the aquifers humanity depends on.

Plants from wetlands can help lessen water pollution by absorbing some harmful fertilizers & pesticides.

Scientists in the GRNP are busy with an evaluation process to determine the whereabouts of wetlands connected to the Knysna estuary.
SANParks welcomes new CEO

Fundisile Mketeni is the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for SANParks. Head of Communications for the Department of Environmental Affairs, Albi Modise says:

‘He holds a Masters Degree in Environmental Management and has 25 years’ experience in the field of Environmental Management, Biodiversity and Conservation. He brings with him a wealth of experience in the development and management of protected areas, tourism development and management; conservation of biodiversity and public sector management.

He started his career as a Trainee Manager and Manager for some of the Eastern Cape Reserves, later moving to SANParks as the Park Manager of the Addo Elephant National Park. He worked in Addo at a time when major tourism developments, concessions and community beneficiation initiatives were being undertaken.

Mr Mketeni’s career at SANParks saw him serve as the Chief Operating Officer for the 19 National Parks except the Kruger National Parks, and acted as Executive Director: Parks before taking up the position of DDG: Biodiversity and Conservation in the Department of Environmental Affairs in 2004.

Mr Mketeni has extensive experience in conservation management. He has spearheaded the country’s biodiversity agenda for the last 10 years as the Deputy Director General (DDG) responsible for Biodiversity and Conservation. It is in this role that Mr Mketeni honed his skills on Policy and Legislation Development, Intergovernmental Coordination, Relations and International Negotiations and Relations. He has also served as a Board member of South African National Parks and Isimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and is currently serving as a Board member of South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

He has played an instrumental role in the development and implementation of South Africa’s rhino anti-poaching legislation and policies as he headed the development of the Rhino Safety and Security Strategy and the Rhino Issue Management Process. He leads the South African negotiating teams to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) between 2004 and 2012.
Sea lettuce (Ulva lactuca) is a form of green algae that comes from the sea (often seen free floating) and can be consumed by herbivorous fish, sea animals, slugs and others. It is bright green in colour but can be white or black when dry. Although more studies are underway, Prof’s report in a nutshell explains how dead and decaying algae push up the greyish, oxidized algae to the surface. He suspects increased hydrogen and phosphate levels in the water which led to last year’s red tide, have led to this year’s visible sea lettuce.

‘December’s strong easterly winds might have pushed the large quantities of nitrogen and phosphate mixed with warm water to intertidal shores.’

It was mainly along the North shore of Ashmead in the vicinity of Costa Sarda and Monk’s Caravan Park.

The Groot River Estuary in Natures Valley, Tsitsikamma, is fed by the Bobbejaan and Groot Rivers. It is 2kms up the bridge of the R102. It is a partially open system with periods of tidal interchange. From time to time, river flow or sea conditions breach the closed estuary naturally to re-establish tidal conditions.

Some uncommon birds found in the estuary include the White Backed Night Heron, the African Finfoot, and lots of forest birds such as the Giant Kingfisher and others. The estuary is home to at least 47 species of fish. (Source: SANParks scientific services).

New creature found in the Knysna estuary
(report from the Knysna-Plett Herald)

The mystery article the Knysna Plett Herald reported about recently was identified by Knysna’s Marine Rangers as an ‘Argonauto argo’ commonly referred to as a paper nautilus.’

‘When a citizen walked in with this creature, we were puzzled’ reports Mark Phillips, a Ranger in the Knysna Marine section. We could identify the creature using the Marine Guide booklet (two oceans) kept in the ranger office. It is a type of an octopus which prefers a sub-tropical environment.

Males of this species grow up to 8 mm whilst females mature at about double the size although they can grow up to 100 mm. Males do not exceed 20 mm.

Its paper-thin ‘shells’ are treasured by beach-goers.’
The State of Knowledge in the Garden Route National Park

South African National Parks’ Garden Route Scientific Services has compiled a State of Knowledge (SOK) report for the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). The main purpose of this report is to improve awareness of the information that is available from various published sources; all of which has relevance to park management, planning and research.

The SOK report does not provide extensive summaries of all the available literature, but rather gives brief introductions to topics covered in published papers and reports relevant to the Park. All information is referenced so that further reading can be done if so required. The current focus of the report is on biophysical and ecological characteristics and environmental processes, which reflects the competencies of the authors. However, it is hoped to widen the scope of this report in the future by providing better cover of other aspects, such as history and the social sciences. To succeed in this task, Garden Route Scientific Services will be dependent upon input by specialists in relevant fields.

The target audience of the SOK was initially SANParks staff but it has become apparent that the report has a much wider appeal and use. Researchers, managers and the general public have found use in the report. It is important that users, especially non-SANParks users, familiarise themselves with the contents of the Disclaimer in the report. The SOK report can be found on the SANParks website http://www.sanparks.org/conservation/scientific/coastal/state_of_knowledge.php

The report will be updated annually, adding more Information. Readers who are aware of omissions or inaccuracies or who wish to make comments on the State of Knowledge Report are encouraged to contact the Regional Ecologist (Jessica Hayes: jessica.hayes@sanparks.org).
Safety measures for bumper season

Writes Brent Whittington, Senior Section Ranger, Tsitsikamma

The GRNP plays an active role in facilitating society to connect in either providing the perfect natural backdrop for family and group fun activities, creating linkages for access to resources, providing job and business opportunities with the associated skills development and ensuring conservation outcomes via local government processes. Cooperative governance is the name of the game.

There is no way that Conservation and Tourism staff can survive the high season in an open-park system, without great working relationships with departments such as SAPS, Traffic Services, NSRI, Medical Rescue, Fire Management and related municipal structures. Joint Operating Centres (JOCS) are regularly established to ensure a safe and pleasurable stay within the Garden Route. The Tsitsikamma Section for instance joined in the Bitou Municipalities’ welcome and safety campaign, the Knysna Section joined in the roadblocks with Knynsa SAPS and in Wilderness the JOC ensured the safety of all water users especially over New Year’s Day, when thousands of local people flock to local estuaries and beaches.

Mayor of the Eden District Municipality, Wessie van der Westhuizen, Mayor of Bitou, Memory Booysen, Rangers from Tsitsikamma and members of the SAPS.
Another such programme to connect society is the Blue Flag Beaches in Nature’s Valley (Bitou Municipality), Brenton Beach (Knysna Municipality), and Wilderness (Eden District Municipality). The Thesens Islands Marina joined this prestigious list in November 2014, when Minister Hanekom of the Department of Tourism officially opened the Blue Flag Beach season. ‘Knysna is one of 3 of my favourite small towns’ said the Minister.

Gabriel Scholtz, Working for the Coast Project Manager, who is responsible for the management of the Wilderness beach/coastline as well as Victoria Bay, shared the following with the newsletter’s editorial team:

Blue Flag Beaches were established in 1987 by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEE). It began with 244 beaches and 208 marinas from 10 countries across Europe; today however there are over 3850 Blue Flag beaches and marinas globally. 48 countries are currently participating in the Blue Flag Programme: Aruba, Bahamas, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominican Republic, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Russia, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Wales. In 2012 following deliberations with the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) WESSA inspired the inclusion of marine protected areas into the Blue Flag criteria rendering Wilderness Beach as the first Blue Flag within the borders of a National Park.

The Wilderness Blue Flag flies from 1 December to 28 February each year and is located at the circular parking area adjacent to Salina’s restaurant and the NSRI (National Sea Rescue Institute). The Working for the Coast Project manages the cleanliness of the Blue Flag area in conjunction with SANParks’ Conservation, Eden District Municipality and the Wilderness Rate Payers Association. WESSA (Wildlife and Environment of South Africa) is the leading Blue Flag authority in the country and ensures that all National Blue Flag participants adhere to the stringent criteria.

What does Blue Flag do for you?

- Swimming safely, cleanliness of the beach. Tourist visit these beaches because of its Blue Flag status and this is to the benefit of local communities and the country.
- A blue flag is awarded on the basis of 4 aspects: Water quality, environmental management, safety and environmental education (information).
People and Conservation Practitioner, Muneer Moses reported that he often joins up with the Working for the Coast team for Marine and Coastal Management educational programmes with local schools. During the gathering, two groups headed up the Touw River and the Wilderness coast respectively for a clean-up operation. These types of activities assist in the real adoption of conservation management by learners.

The Day of Reconciliation once again saw the Wilderness staff and BSP team giving back to community elders from Touwsranten. Staff donated funds for the gift hampers from their own pockets. Sharing in this initiative was the Department of Social Development and Working for Water. Talks included the rights of the elderly, with contact details of organisations which can be contacted for assistance. “This event afforded staff a better understanding of the socio-economic circumstances of our neighbouring communities, says Marionette Scholtz, HR Officer and Wellness coordinator for the GRNP.
The recent unfortunate accident where a visitor slipped and fell in the Homtini River has prompted SANParks to revisit its stance on commercial tour operators in the Knysna forest (part of the Garden Route National Park). The area is considered one of Knysna’s gems where hiking and swimming are allowed and visitors flock there for its sense of place. Only a few visitors are allowed at a time (up to 12).

**GRNP Business Development Manager, Andile Namntu** says “the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, 2003 (Act No 57 of 2003) authorizes SANParks to allow commercial activities in a National Park.” Namntu has also conducted various workshops within the municipal areas of Eden District, George, Knysna, Bitou and Koukamma.

Jill Bunding-Venter, General Manager of GRNP, once again publicly confirmed that anyone operating within a National Park must obtain an operating license/permit and or submit an unsolicited bid and/ or respond to a solicited bid as advertised. These may include activities such as guided tours within the forest on clearly demarcated walking routes/trails, via access through an Official SANParks entrance gate. The GRNP is however aware that due to its fragmented nature and “open access” areas, that some operators abuse the system by illegally taking visitors off the approved entrances and trails, offering additional activities.

“We therefore renew our appeal to all commercial operators in the forest to contact us on 044 302 5600 to speak to our Business Development Division. Section 16.1 of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) prescribes a private party wanting to make use of state property for commercial purposes needs to enter into a Private Public Partnership Agreement (PPP) with the relevant state institution” implores Bunding-Venter.

Activities currently on offer in the Garden Route National Park include hiking and nature walks, forest excursions, birding, mountain biking and water activities. For more information, kindly visit: [http://www.sanparks.org.za/parks/garden_route/](http://www.sanparks.org.za/parks/garden_route/)

Small and medium sized business owners during the first business workshop in Tsitsikamma in 2014.

**Did you know?**

The Park will have 34 events managed by private companies ranging from small to medium. All Regional internal stakeholders recently met to iron out roles and responsibilities.

Business workshops started in 2013 during SA National Parks Week will be rolled out to other parts of the GRNP this year.

Segways were introduced in the Wilderness section of the GRNP from the 02nd of February 2015. An hour’s tour traverses the Kingfisher trail. Staff are encouraged to go and try them out!
Tourism
‘Adventure is in our nature’

In conjunction with the SANParks’ national drive towards product development much emphasis had been placed on the finalisation of architectural plans for the upgrade of the Tsitsikamma restaurant precinct, the upgrade of the oceanettes, the entrance gate, new administration building and the Big Tree activity hub. Tenders for these different contracts are due to be advertised in March 2015. (just check this statement with Andile: Expression of interest had been advertised for a zipline across the Kranshoek gorge in the Knysna section); Permanent tents are in the process of being erected on the Diepwalle tent decks, to be opened in March 2015. The popular segway activity has been duplicated from the one which started in the Tsitsikamma Section during 2013. In the Ebb and Flow restcamp, which affords guests the opportunity to experience the Pied Kingfisher trail along fynbos and wetlands from a different viewpoint. The insourcing of the canoe hire and trails took off with a bang on the Touw river.

All tourism indicators are on an upward trend with a total number of visitors at 17.5% increase and a significant difference in black visitors of 17.16% . The prolonged school holidays contributed majorly to these figures. The season was concluded with only one major incident of a drowning at the Swartvlei Mouth.

Graph as depicted in the WESGRO report available on twitter: https://twitter.com/Wesgro/status/567217606944624641?s=08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Apr 13 – Jan 14</th>
<th>Apr 14 – Jan 15</th>
<th>Difference %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guest to Parks</td>
<td>268 945</td>
<td>315 869</td>
<td>17.45% Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Visitors</td>
<td>207 014</td>
<td>246 918</td>
<td>19.27% Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnight Visitors</td>
<td>61 931</td>
<td>68 951</td>
<td>11.33% Increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Black visitors    | 33 437          | 39 176          | 17.16% Increase |
| Black Overnight Visitors | 5 214           | 5 381           | 3.20% Increase  |
| Day Black Visitors      | 28 259          | 33 795          | 19.6% Increase  |
We are extremely proud of the National Kudu Award presented to Victor Cunningham, in November 2014. Kudu Awards recognise excellent performance in the organisation. The Tsitsikamma section narrowly lost out to the Mountain Zebra National Park, as Best Camp of the Year for 2014.

Victor Cunningham was a proud recipient of a National Kudu Awards for ‘Excellent Performance in the Workplace. He was recognized for taking day and overnight trails to greater height during the 2013/2014 period. The glitzy Award Ceremony was held in Ghallagher Estate, Johannesburg.

Recipients of long-service Awards in Wilderness recently:

- Daniel May 20 years of service
- Marionette Scholtz 10 years of service
- Wendy Cyster 20 years of service
- Willie Laminie 5 years of service
- Cyril Sam 25 years of service
- Oom Abram Windwaai (40 years of service), was not available on the day.

The GRNP held lunch with recently retired scientist Dr. Nick Hanekom. Everyone has fond memories of Nic. Elzette Bester handed the Region’s gift over to him of a painting (far right).

Nick started working for SANParks in 1982 and was based in the Tsitsikamma section of the GRNP. His extensive research into the value of invertebrates to ecosystems made a significant input to his work as a Marine Ecologist for rocky shores. When he retired in November last year, (2014) he was based in Rondevlei.

Nic will be missed for his most valuable contribution to SANParks and the sector.
The wellness and development of all staff is a clear target for SANParks, says Nomthinjana Maxwele, HR Manager. The first week of December hailed in informative sessions on HIV/ AIDS, while January 2015 recognised that we are a diverse group of people working together with a Diversity Management Workshop.

Diversity Management Workshop Round 1

Different Individuals Valuing Each other Regardless of Skin Intellect Talents or Years

Pictures showing various groups:
Group work during the workshop delved into diversity and interpersonal skills, interrogated the difference between discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice.

For a snippet of what took place during group discussions, take your memory stick to the comms office to upload video footage.
Meet Andre Petersen
New Technical Manager, Tsitsikamma

Q: Who is Andre?
AP: I was born in Cape Town, but was raised in a small town called Ceres in the Boland. I went to school in Ceres and finished my Matric there. I then enrolled at the then Peninsula Technicon for a diploma in civil engineering. My interest in civil engineering came from working with my uncle over school holidays in the building industry. I am married with three kids and I am a real family man. I think that I would do anything to keep my family happy.

Q: Who do others say he is? 😊
A: I had the opportunity to find out what other people think of me during my farewell party. The general consensus is that I am a loyal hardworking, bit of a workaholic, but reasonable manager.

Q: Where did you work before joining SANParks?
A: I worked for the Knysna Municipality for 7 years, starting as an Area Manager and ending up running the sewer and water operations for the whole of the Knysna area. Prior to that I worked for Bitou (Plett) municipality for 11 years, starting as a senior foreman and ending up as a Manager for roads, and Infrastructure.

Q: How are you finding Tsitsikamma thus far?
A: Thus far I am still in the honeymoon phase where everything is seen through rose-coloured glasses. *(he giggles)* The team that I work with, both seniors and juniors seems to love what they are doing!

Q: Pet love (things you love doing, or things you hold dear)
A: Being involved in my community, helping at church, just be busy with things that matter. Teaching others new skills, etc. I’m also a great cook.

Q: Pet hates
A: Being late, and being lied to

Q: Hobbies
A: Cycling, Paintball games, walking, reading up on infrastructure, adventure sports. I’m a self-confessed couch potato for rugby, soccer and Formula 1.

Q: What’s in your bucket list (must-do for 2015)
A: I have to do a few cycling races(mainly mountain biking), my plan is to start during the Knysna Oyster Festival in July.
To prove that the GRNP staff is passionate about providing an exceptional service to all our visitors, we include compliments received below.

Corne Liebenberg writes

Please allow me to say a huge thank you once again to Hesron Ruiters at the Garden Route National Park (Tsitsikamma). We visit every year during Dec/Jan and every year he is an absolute pleasure to deal with. His dedication to his work, his professional and friendly attitude and his attention to detail makes arranging our stay a pleasant and hassle free task every single time. We once again had an awesome holiday at your park and, with a huge thank you again to Hesron, our next holiday for Dec 2015 has been booked.

Magwayi Ben Mabena writes

On 1st Jan 2015, my family and I checked in at the park for our holidays. We travelled all the way from Pretoria thereto. Upon entry and about to check in, we received a call from our son, who remained behind, that he has been attacked at home and was bleeding. We had to cut short our visit and return back home. Our deep GRATITUDE to Hesron Ruiters. He was so emphatic, helpful and compassionate to our situation. He booked us in for the night and did all documentation to assist us to return back the following day. With people like Hesron in your service, Tsitsikama is in good hands.

The Bezuidenhout family

Compliments of the season for you and your loved ones!!!
I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Werner and your staff at Storms River for the excellent service and assistance with the arrangement of our accommodation during our December 2014 holiday. Your passion, drive, professionalism and constant willingness to go the extra mile, could be seen in the many happy faces of holidaymakers at Tsitsikamma! You have once again done SANPARKS proud. We sincerely thank you and your staff for the wonderful holiday.

Nathan Booysen writes

Excellent service... Friendly, helping and caring staff. I really would recommend ebb and flow wilderness to anyone... I had two problems and they solved it almost instantly... If you want to relax your mind or want adventure, come to ebb and flow... 2 nights in a rondawel and I loved it...

Ruth Thabane writes

Ebb & Flow is one of our favourite camps but please don’t put ‘own ablutions’ in the remaining rondavels! Walking to the shared ablutions-which are always beautifully clean- day or night, is always a pleasure and well-worth the extra room to move one haves in the uncluttered rondavels.
21 November 1990 - 12 February 2015

The team in the GRNP expressed their shock and sadness at the recent tragic passing of one of their own, Franklin Koopman. Franklin was born on 21 November 1990 in Hankey and grew up in Coldstream where he also completed his schooling in Tsitsikamma in the Eastern Cape. He is the youngest son of Oom Andries (who works for SANParks in Tsitsikamma) and Spaas Koopman.

Franklin joined the High Altitude team in Tsitsikamma on 01 April 2013. His colleagues referred to him as “Franky”. They will always remember the way he greeted them: “Warap” (slang word for What’s Up or How are you?).

“Ons gaan jou baie mis Franky”
You will be sorely missed. May your soul rest in peace.

WoF team