Garden Route National Park’s exact location: Western Cape and Eastern Cape
Nearest Cities: George (West) and PE (East)
GPS coordinates: 34°0’S 23°15’E / 34.000°S 23.250°E / -34.000; 23.250 Coordinates: 34°0’S 23°15’E / 34.000°S 23.250°E / -34.000; 23.250
Contribute!

Want to see your news in the GRNP bi-monthly? Send your news, pics, articles and announcements to: Nandi Mgwadlamba. If you would like to become part of the editorial committee, please contact nandi.mgwadlamba@sanparks.org

Jill Bunding-Venter
General Manager: Garden Route National Park
Global News

Biodiversity month in May

22 May is International Biodiversity Day. This year’s theme is ‘biodiversity and sustainable development.’

Biodiversity really is life, this can refer to genetic variation, species variation, or ecosystem variation within an area. The Cape Floral Kingdom (CFK) is one of six globally recognized plant kingdoms and occurs in South Africa in the Western Cape Province extending eastwards into the Eastern Cape Province. The Cape Floral Kingdom is the smallest of all six kingdoms and is rich in biodiversity - 8700 plant species, and high endemism, 68% of its plant species are confined to this kingdom 90 000km2 large.

The CFK consists of the five biomes namely: fynbos, renosterveld, succulent karoo, sub-tropical thicket and afromontane forest. Fynbos is the dominant vegetation of the CFK as 80 percent of the CFK consists of fynbos.

Local News

How true is the Knysna seahorse poaching story?

Although seahorses are not the most poached marine creatures in the GRNP, recent incidence has led to marine rangers of the Knysna section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) beefing up security measures. First there was an account of a gentleman who was tried to sell a seahorse to the Knysna Basin Project. He immediately reported it to the rangers.

Senior Section Marine Ranger, Owen Govender says it is illegal to capture, disturb, keep or sell seahorses without a permit from either the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and or that of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF). ‘The Knysna seahorse is an endangered species according to the IUCN Red data list and it is a protected species under the South African Environmental Management Biodiversity act of 2004. No seahorses may be disturbed in their natural habitat or removed from the estuary.’

Additional incidents days after this event included dead seahorses found , first through a fishing net identified by a resident as illegal and also at a different venue by passers-by.

SANParks has ever since joined forces with Law enforcement agencies including SAPS, community policing forums and others to get to the bottom of this matter.

Bulbina latifolia:

Rooiwortel

Roots can be taken orally to quell vomiting and diarrhoea, but also used for a number of other ailments.

Agathosma sp: Buchu or Fyn buchu

Mostly used for essential oil, this oil is widely used in food and flavouring industry to enhance flavour.

Treatment of colds, influenza and digestive disturbance.

Clausenia anisata:

Perdepis

Used for fever, gastro-intestinal disorders, pneumonia, headache, sore throat and sinusitis.

Used as tonic for pregnant women before and after birth to ease delivery and to expel blood from the uterus, and later boost milk production.

Roots also chewed to combat indigestion.
WESGRO releases tourism figures for 2014/2015-GRNP ‘s sterling performance

In January 2015, the Provincial MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Alan Winde acknowledged the staggering growth of tourism in the Western Cape. ‘The increase in visitor numbers throughout the province is reassuring to an industry that contributes more than R18 billion to our provincial economy annually and employs approximately 150 000 people’ said the MEC.’

Parks and sections of the Garden Route National Park were acknowledged in the WESGRO report as significant contributors. ‘Other key attractions in the Province that experienced good year on year growth when comparing December 2013 to 2014 include; the West Coast National Park who welcomed 36 598 visitors in 2014 compared to 35 852 in 2013 while the Wilderness National Park in the Garden Route increased its December numbers by 21.7% hosting 25 495 visitors in 2014.’

In February, the MEC made another announcement, this time, presenting a snapshot of the numbers for the past three years,. This was to assess visitor numbers in the last 3 years. “We’re seeing an increase in international and domestic tourists and we are seeing greater movement of tourists to regions across the province.
Attractions in the Cape Overberg, such as the Agulhas National Park, which experienced a 130% increase in visitors and De Hoop, which recorded a 30% increase year on year. The Garden Route and Klein Karoo saw equally impressive growth, with both the Tsitsikamma National Park and the Wilderness National Park achieving over 20% growth in visitors year on year.”

According to the report: Tsitsikamma had 34 890 visitors in January 2015, up from 31 960 in December 2014 and 20 561 in December 2012. Wilderness recorded 43 073 in December 2014 and January 2015 combined, increasing from 36 813 in December 2013 and January 2014.
Fire in Harkerville

The public is still requested to exercise caution during an upcoming planned ecological burning exercise. SANParks, Cape Pine and the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association are gearing up to burn fynbos in the Harkerville Section of the Garden Route National Park during May/June 2015. So says Area Manager of the Knysna section of the Garden Route National Park, Johan de Klerk ‘fynbos is a vegetation type which is adapted to fire and more so, dependent on fire. Many species only recruit after a fire as fire stimulates seed release and germination. Without fire, there would be no fynbos.’

During the fire, areas of the popular Harkerville Coastal Hiking trail will not be accessible as well as the Kranshoek picnic area and the angling spots along the coast within the Harkerville section. The controlled burn is a joint initiative between Cape Pine and SANParks and resources will be shared during the burn while being assisted by the Southern Cape Fire Protection Agency’s Working on Fire teams. SANParks vegetation ecologist, Dr Tineke Kraaij says fire does not only facilitate the recruitment of fynbos, it also propagates alien invasive plants such as pines and wattles. ‘Provision therefore has to be made for dedicated alien plant clearing operations after the fire.’ The interplay between different biomes or vegetation types such as fynbos and thicket is a key motivation to burn. She says ‘in landscapes where fire is kept out indefinitely, fynbos usually reverts to thicket vegetation or forest, as would be the case if Harkerville doesn’t burn. In order to maintain healthy and diverse fynbos, fire has to occur within acceptable limits of variation in terms of its frequency and intensity.’

She adds that fynbos fires should occur at intervals of 10 to 30 years. Natural fires typically occur during warm and dry weather conditions which result in high intensity fires, which is desirable from an ecological point of view.

In the Garden Route, fires may occur during any season, although fires need to be of sufficient intensity to facilitate good recovery of most species. In the Western parts of the Fynbos Biome with a predominantly winter-rainfall climate, fires mostly occur during the hot, dry summers. In the Garden Route with its all-year rainfall, hot, dry conditions may occur any time of the year and particularly with berg wind conditions in winter.
Protecting and conserving our water

The Wilderness Pollution Action Committee which was initiated in January 2015 has become a priority for a number of stakeholders in the area. Area Manager for Wilderness, Sandra Taljaard says ‘it will serve a good purpose to monitor the Touw River system, as well as other water bodies in the National Park more regularly, in conjunction with all other relevant stakeholders. ‘The aim is to monitor the systems on a more regular and scheduled basis and when there is a crisis to allow for more test samples to be taken on an ad hoc basis.’

Currently partners partaking in this initiative are Eden District Municipality (Health) to test bacteriological samples in relation to the Department of Water Affairs’ guidelines especially for recreational areas, the George Local Municipality that is also well represented on the Committee, as well as SANParks.

‘We certainly will be inviting chairpersons of the relevant Ratepayers Associations and structures representing civil society such as Water and Environmental forum chairpersons.’

The current situation where the National Health Laboratory (NHL) in Cape Town has closed down, the George Municipality and Eden District’s Health division are working to find a viable solution where samples can be tested with a fairly reasonable amount of time and be interpreted for public consumption.

Sampling points by the George Municipality are in the Touw River estuary (further up and also down), Freesia Rock, Ebb & Flow Rest Camp (North and South) and South side. Monitoring will include the bacteriological state of the system and will include sampling for ecoli levels in the water.

Recent reports on bird mortalities in Wilderness indicate 2 things

- Dead birds collected by rangers and scientists in the Wilderness Lakes system might have died from natural causes. (Eden District Municipality Report).
- State Vet report indicates both tests for avian flu and came back negative.

Dogs threaten birds like the African Oystercatcher Facts provided by Muneer Moses & the Sedgefield Conservancy

Adults and chicks become separated and nests and youngsters become vulnerable to trampling and predation by gulls, dogs and man. Their nest is often a shallow scrape in the sand on exposed beaches and vulnerable to roving and excitable dogs. Incubation of eggs is about 29 days and youngsters take about 45 days to become independent. Breeding success rate is 20-40%. Black Oystercatchers are threatened by disturbance and coastal development; the total population is less than 6500 individuals. They normally breed between September and April. The breeding pairs along this beach are monitored on a regular basis and have been for nearly two decades.
Progress of the Khayalethu Projects
Melaney Barrath

The Khayalethu project is about continued utilization of indigenous medicinal plants without jeopardizing the biodiversity of the area, a Natural Resource User Group (NRUGS) was established within the local communities surrounding the National Park. The group consists of traditional healers, traditional surgeons and Rastafarian herbalists all of whom use medicinal plants for their spiritual practices, acts of healing and ultimately for their livelihood. Through engagement by SANParks with this group it was clear that an alternative source of medicinal plants needed to be established. With high concentrations of indigenous medicinal plant vegetation inside the National Park, an important component of the Parks Management Plan is to create alternatives for this user group in order to reduce the local people’s dependence on the natural resource (particularly fragile vegetation life) of the National Park.

Thus far, the Ward Councillor for Khayalethu Titi Gombo is on board and was at this year’s information session. The session helped clarify the larger communities interest in the project. More involvement will be through the Community Project Forum (CPF). The last CPF was held on Thursday, 12 March 2015.

We are currently following a process with Knysna Municipality in order to gain approval for building plans for the nursery. We envision this process to take two months at most.

Building capacity to ensure sustainability

We are currently following a process with Knysna Municipality in order to gain approval for building plans for the nursery. We envision this process to take two months at most. Training will be taking place over a 6 month period between May 2015 and November 2015. It is planned that the nursery structure should be up by August 2015 so by the end of the training the beneficiaries will be able to exercise their new skills within the nursery.
Kids in Parks (Tsitsikamma)

 Writes Richmond Gewers, P&C: Tsitsikamma

A total of 504 learners were part of the Kids in Parks Programme this year. The main Regional event was in Tsitsikamma.

The three-day programme allows for learners to discover and experience nature in a fun way. It also exposes them to the importance of a National Park. The primary target group is learners from nearby schools and mostly from disadvantaged communities. The children learn to identify, name and describe the fauna and flora. They learn about biodiversity and how to sustain it.

The initiative is a partnership between SANParks, Pick n Pay and the departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and Education (DoE).

Lots of time for edutainment at the recent Kids in Parks. Learners pictured here having the time of their lives. Learners from different schools get to spend at least 3 days in the Park as part of the Programme.

Did you know?

Approximately 4677 learners were reached through the Environmental Programmes in 2014. This is a +38% increase on a target of 3389.

Free entrants for 2014 were at 4677 (55.90% increase) compared to a target of 3000.
Tourism
‘Adventure is in our nature’

Tourism Roadshows a great one on one platform
Writes Nicholas Nelukalo

Anyone who has ever either had to set up an exhibition stand or manage one knows the hard work it is. So we went in prepared as the Cape SANParks team made up of the GRNP and a representative for the Cape Parks. We were armed with all the brochures from the GRNP brochures, Cape Cluster brochures, Arid Cluster brochures, Addo to Karoo Route brochures, Price lists. We were cheerful to see a lot of familiar faces and there was generally a lot of interaction at our stall.

Dominant concerns remained Wild Card issue (the time period between application and receiving one, as well as ongoing debates about how activity tariffs should be curbed for all Wild Card holders. Some clients were upset that overnight visitors are forced to pay conservation fees, others still hammering last year’s activity tariff increase.

Nicholas at the exhibition stand serving at least 4 visitors at a go. Below is a picture of the actual well-branded stand.
Tourism
‘Adventure is in our nature’

Recent floods in Natures Valley

Subsequent to 113 mm of rain on Saturday (the 04\textsuperscript{th} April), the De Vasselot Rest Camp in Natures Valley was temporarily closed and hikers and campers relocated to the main camp in Storms River, Tsitsikamma. All hiking trails remained closed for the Easter Weekend. Good news is the Otter Trail has been re-opened after SANParks rangers reported that hikers will be able to cross the section from the Waterfall to the Ngubu hut three days after the incident.

So says Brent Whittington, Senior Section Ranger in Tsitsikamma, ‘our rangers were ready for call-outs, especially from the emergency escape routes east of the Elandsbos, Lottering & Bloukrans River crossings.’ Updates of trail conditions were also communicated to operational staff to ensure the correct information was conveyed to prospective hikers.

Natures Valley is one of the best spots for birding in the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). The Nature’s Valley Rest Camp in the Tsitsikamma Section of the Garden Route National Park is situated in the De Vasselot on the banks of the Groot River, about 30km from the town of Plettenberg Bay and about 40km from Storms River Rest Camp (Tsitsikamma Section).
Tourism
‘Adventure is in our nature’

Suspension bridge structurally sound

The maintenance work on the main suspension bridge in the Storms River Rest Camp commenced on the 12th of January 2015. Work was expected to last for approximately 6 weeks but heavy rains postponed plans. Work was completed in early March 2015 thanks to a dedicated team of expert engineers.

The suspension bridge is popular among visitors for its shaky yet concrete structure over the Indian Ocean. It leads to the lookout point showcasing the breathtaking variety of indigenous forests, the Marine Protected Area (now 50 years old) and rivers in the area.

The bridge was constructed in 1969 and is about 77 meters long. 2 additional bridges were constructed in 2006. It has become standard operating procedure to maintain the bridge every 5 years.

It has become standard operating procedure to maintain the bridge every 5 years.

Technical Manager of the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP), Andre Petersen says ‘the bridge is structurally sound.’

Segways

Visitors to the Ebb & Flow rest camp (Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park) can now traverse the Kingfisher Trail on a Segway. As the Segways tours, which had been introduced in the Tsitsikamma Section of the park 2 years ago, had become such a popular activity, it was also launched in Wilderness in February just weeks before Valentines Day.

‘Visitors to the Park get to experience our natural resources in a unique way. Expect the fresh smells of fynbos and the magic of the birdlife congregating in the wetlands’ explain Andre and Michelle Kruger of Segway Tours.

Sandra Taljaard, Area Manager of Wilderness says the Park took on this new product because ‘it’s an exciting activity for diverse visitors, including the young, the old as well as those who are physically challenged.’

She adds that what Segway Tours brings to the Park is a product range that aligns well with the Park’s new slogan ‘Adventure is in our Nature.’

Tented camping decks (Diepwalle)

Have you seen Knysna’s latest tented camping decks?
They are existing camping decks fitted with a tent that includes 2 x single beds, a matrass, a bar refrigerator, two lockable “kists”, coffee table and an LED light inside the tent. Braai facilities are also available on the deck.

Guests need to supply their own bedding and/or sleeping bag and the remaining camping equipment an amenities.
Not taking training for granted

The recent training in the GRNP on ‘finance for non-finance managers’ has some Regional colleagues walking with their heads held up high. Matthew Mbatyazwa says he feels empowered beyond measurable means. ‘I now understand the organization and how its finance structures work’ admits Mbatyazwa who has been working for the supply chain division since 2001. When the Forestry Department’s team moved over to SANParks, he moved to finance. Supervisor, Thea Lucas, says the training was recommended for ‘Bhut Matthew’ as he is affectionately known, to broaden his understanding of how finance is structured in the Region and also at a National level. Mbatyazwa confirms what is already popularly known about this course, that it provides an easy-to-understand guide to the finances of an organization. ‘I will not forget this investment. It is significant and eye-opening. I feel so confident to engage anyone on finances and our systems now’ he says with excitement.

Training days in the GRNP

- Do not miss the Wellness Roadshow

There’s a brand new service provider (Metropolitan) for all wellness issues. There will be a 2-hour presentation. A wellness strategy will also be unpacked by officials from our National Office. See emails from your HROs.

- Do not miss the Performance Management training

Training is starting with everyone who has a contracting document with SANParks. This is not to be missed. Please check emails from your HROs.

- GRNP Awards Roadshow

04 June 2015- Wilderness
09 June- Tsitsikamma
10 June 2015- Knysna

Did you know?

Cheryl Wiley, HR Officer for Knysna provided these figures for your information in consultation with Marionette Scholtz (HRO: Wilderness) and Valencia Cunningham (HRO: Tsitsikamma): These pertain to the number of environmental monitors and interns in the GRNP

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Meet Geneve Lupacchini
New Office Manager for the GM’s office

Geneve is the new Office Manager for the General Manager: GRNP’s office.
She started working for SANParks in 2011 as an intern in Wilderness. Then in the same year, November, she accepted a position in the Regional Office (Knysna).
Her work has been to interface with clients and stakeholders as well as working with the Tourism and Marketing team.
**Q:** How are you finding your work currently?
**A:** Adventurous and inspiring and up for a challenge.

**Q:** What are your hobbies?
**A:** Hiking, swimming, arts and crafts

**Q:** What did you enjoy about your previous job?
**A:** To satisfy clients

**Q:** Bringing into your new job that you’ve learnt from your previous job?
**A:** Patience

**Q:** What did you not know about Gen?
**A:** She’s worked with Nicholas Nelukalo in Wilderness managing reception.

Meet Bongiwe Ntsipho
Finance Administrator for Knysna

Bongiwe joined the Knysna section of the GRNP in August 2014 as a Finance Admin Officer. She previously worked for the Knysna Municipality as a Finance intern.

**Q:** So what do you enjoy about your new position?
**A:** The environment makes working here a pleasure. The people are friendly, supportive and nice. The job itself is spectacular and I’m learning so much. I’m learning more about

**Q:** What does your job entail?
**A:** Administration for vessel permits, reconciling cycling tags, preps for the payment of events, etc.

**Q:** What are your hobbies?
**A:** I love cooking and going out with friends
Meet Lindi Engelbrecht-Wilbraham  
Knysna’s section’s Finance Admin

Lindi started working at SANParks in August last year and is not new in the conservation/tourism sector. She has worked for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, a Provincial environment agency. Lindi has extensive experience in finances as well, over 13 years experience.

Q: How are you finding your work thus far?
A: Very, very good

Q: Besides the seahorse tank you’ve managed so well thus far, what do you enjoy about your work?
A: Any interaction with people. I like wildlife in general.

Q: What are your hobbies?
A: Photography, cycling, bird watching, computers and going on holiday.

Meet Thuthula Fobosi  
Storms River Rest Camp’s new Duty Manager

Thuthula started off as an intern for the Frontier Region back in 2004. In 2006 she got her first position in the Karoo National Park. In 2009 she accepted a position as a Duty Manager for Mountain Zebra National Park. She is now the Duty Manager for the Storms River Rest Camp (Tsitsikamma).

Q: So what do you enjoy about being a Duty Manager?
A: Putting a smile on people’s faces. Word of mouth is the best marketing tool so when people are happy, they tend to spread the news a lot quicker.

Q: What are your hobbies?
A: I love reading Xhosa short stories, taking nature walks and hikes.

Q: How is your job thus far?
A: I’m adjusting well.

Johan de Klerk, Area Manager of Knysna recently shared his birthday with Regional colleagues.
GRNP People

GRNP Regional team gathered to bid farewell to HR Manager, Nomthi Maxwele.

The team gathered on Friday, the 27 March to bid Nomthi farewell. She has relocated to greener pastures in the Eastern Cape.
Nomthi has worked for SANParks since 2008 as an HR Officer for the Regional Office and then became the HR Manager in 2010.
Her scope of work included among others recruitment and selection, labour relations and training.
Nomthi will be missed for her passionate love for all kinds of elegant shoes.

Preparations to surprise Nomthi (left). Nomthi poses with Geneve Lupacchini (right).

Farewell to Annie Makalane

Annie Makalane who managed the office of the GM: GNRP has moved onto manage the office of the Managing Executive :Parks. Makalane says she’s adjusting well in the fact-paced, deadline driven culture of a big city like Pretoria.
A team from the Regional Office met up with her during her recent visit to the Region. She thought she had a meeting when she unsuspectingly was led to the Spur at the Waterfront for a breakfast surprise farewell.

A surprised Annie could not stop smiling. Pictured stunned by her neatly wrapped gift above with Cheryl (left) and the GM (right).

Scientific services bid farewell to Dr Tineke Kraaij

Tineke started working for Scientific Services in the Garden Route in 2002 as a Fynbos ecologist. Before this she had worked as a vegetation ecologist (which is more than just fynbos with a focus on rare and endemic species as well as research on fire. She worked primarily in Bontebok and Agulhas National Parks and also Wilderness.
One of her colleagues Nerina Kruger, says she will be sorely missed and although no one is irreplaceable, she will leave a huge gap in the Division and also at SANParks. ‘She has brought a wealth of knowledge to the organisation’ says Kruger.
Tineke has accepted an academic position at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).
Could you guess that her all-time favourite hobby is surfing?
Thumbs Up!

Lieb and Elsie Liebenberg
‘We have just returned back home from a wonderful thirty day holiday at the above mentioned resort.
We herewith extend our special thanks to all the staff at the reception office who always attend to the requirements of guests with such courtesy and efficiency.
In particular we wish to compliment Hesron Ruiters (Front Desk Supervisor) for the outstanding manner in which he tends to tourists who are experiencing reservations problems.
It was a privilege listening to him speaking on the phone to clients who required information etc.
This was done in a most professional, friendly and patient manner.
‘It was really a pleasure to visit the reception office whenever we required their services and we are looking forward to our next visit at the Rest Camp.’

The Bezuidenhout Family wrote about Werner and Hesron
‘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.’

Brian and Noelene Cole write about the Wilderness National Park
‘It was a perfect place to be. Splendid nature, very neat, nice to canoe, to walk on the trails and the wilderness beach; in sort we enjoyed every minute of our staying.Two remarks: the grass on the campsite was far too high and the ablution facilities on the main campsite was too restricted for the number of people on that main site.’

Knysna marine rangers praised in local newspaper

Rangers in the Marine component were praised in the Knysna Plett Herald recently (30 April 2015) for finding a missing boat ‘Plume’.
The owner of the boat was excited rangers had found ‘Plume’ after it went missing. To sum up the incident, Owen Govender of the Knysna section of the GRNP, suspects ‘the boat’s mooring line must have been untied.’

Congratulations to Kyle Smith who recently married Matty-Dalen Smith. The wedding ceremony was held in February. We wish them all the best for the future!

Congratulations to Carel van der Merwe who recently became a grand dad. We will post a picture of his grand bundle of joy in the next issue of the GRNP newsletter.