

NEWS FROM THE ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK, South Africa *February/March 2007*



About this newsletter

This is a general newsletter - sent out on a monthly basis - about the latest happenings and developments in the Addo Elephant National Park. Please see contact details at the end for further enquiries.

MINISTER MAKES ANNOUNCEMENT ON ELEPHANT MANAGEMENT

Policy Announcement by, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, South African Minister of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, on the Occasion of the Publication of the Draft Norms & Standards for Elephant Management for Public Comment, Addo Elephant Park, 28 February 2007

Minister's Speech: Our Approach to Elephant Management

"On 20 September 2005, I outlined the Government's approach to addressing what was considered the increasingly pressing challenge of managing elephants in South Africa.

I committed our department to finding practical and sustainable solutions that were fair to people, elephants, and our broader environment.

In parallel, we committed ourselves to an extensive consultative process to enlighten us on the environmental, social, economic and ethical dimensions of the so-called elephant debate.

My office has received literally hundreds of submissions from interested and affected parties. These included a great many heartfelt pleas not to harm the elephants, to protect our parks from excessive damage by elephants and also to protect communities and their crops from elephants. Many institutions submitted position papers and recommended guidelines. Numerous scientists drew our attention to their research findings. Every submission helped our team to gain a better understanding of the issue.

Before addressing the main thrust of our approach to elephant management, it is perhaps useful to observe that elephants play a significant role in both creating and destroying opportunities for other elements of biological diversity to thrive.

South Africa is faced with a particular challenge as most of our protected areas are fenced and surrounded by land that has been transformed, to a greater or lesser extent, by human development.

Elephants are potentially difficult to confine within protected areas, and if they leave the area, they pose a threat to the lives and property of neighbours.

Ladies and gentlemen, in an ideal world, humans would co-exist peacefully with other life-forms in a natural state, but this is no longer possible. Humankind has interfered mightily with nature over the millennia. Nature has, in turn, taken its toll on human life.

Regardless, we are now faced with the prospect of having to make difficult decisions in a complex setting. Our challenge is to develop an equitable balance between the needs of humankind and the needs of nature, and a biodiversity balance within eco-systems.

Policy guidelines are needed to provide a framework within which government can make decisions, and within which management plans can be formulated by agencies responsible for protecting elephants and the ecological systems in which they exist.

Though our conservation decision making, is always guided by the best available science, it is common cause that we continue to be confronted by a degree of scientific uncertainty in respect of the long term relationship between elephants and their environment.

Decisions on elephant management are ultimately based on societal value systems, since they involve trade-offs between different things that are legitimately valued by society. The divergence of views on elephant management arises primarily from different values held by different stakeholders.

Scientific information, alone, cannot resolve these value differences. It is up to decision makers to set the value systems and make the laws that underpin them.

We have taken care in the Draft Norms and Standards for Elephant Management to set out Guiding Principles that will inform decision making. These principles are based on respect for elephants, reverence for humans and recognition that we are faced with a degree of scientific uncertainty in our decision making.

An emphasis on values, and the rights of elephants as opposed to that of humans, should increasingly be balanced by a better understanding of what might be called "elephant science".

I am therefore pleased to announce in this context that my Department will contribute an initial R5 million this year to the research project proposed by the Science Round Table, which consists of 21 scientists who have participated with me in a series of discussions on elephant management.

They have proposed a comprehensive research plan that will hopefully reduce the scientific uncertainty concerning elephants whilst we continue to deal with our immediate challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am satisfied that within the African context, sustainable use of natural resources is necessary and appropriate. I also insist, however, that the management of our natural resources should be conducted ethically, humanely and rationally. Wilful cruelty to animals must be condemned and avoided at all costs.

The Draft Norms and Standards is, I believe, a well balanced document that addresses the interests and welfare of elephants in equal measure to the options for

- controlling elephant populations.

As most observers will know, there are a wide range of options available for reducing the negative impacts of elephants on biodiversity or human livelihoods. These include:

- Do nothing at all (or "leave it to nature")

- Range expansion
- Translocation of elephants to establish new populations or enhance existing populations in other conservation areas
- Modulating and moderating densities across space within and outside Protected Areas (using fencing combined with water and food supply management)
- Protecting ecologically sensitive areas by excluding elephants from them.
- Creating enclosure and/or enclosure fencing within protected areas, with or without manipulating water supplies, to protect highly sensitive species or areas of particular biodiversity importance
- Reducing birth rate by contraception to effect, in the long term, a reduction in population growth rate or size
- Improving and extending fencing to reduce human-elephant conflict
- Increasing mortality by culling to reduce population numbers or cropping to hold numbers stable
- Combining these options based on local circumstances

We have listened to numerous discussions about the merits and demerits of the various management options. Some, such as culling and contraception I would personally have preferred not to consider, but I am persuaded that all these options have a potential role to play under different circumstances.

The DN&S therefore provide for population control of elephants using one or more of the following options:

- range manipulation (meaning water supply management, enclosure or exclosure, the creation of corridors of movement between different areas; or the expansion of the range by acquisition of additional land)
- removal by translocation;
- introduction of elephants;
- contraception; and
- culling.

In regard to the more controversial options of culling and contraception, decision making authorities will be guided by the DN&S principles which state that:

- whilst contraception appears to be a promising measure to control the rate of reproduction of elephants in certain limited circumstances, the long-term social, physiological and emotional impacts on elephants are not yet fully understood and current contraception methods are highly invasive and should therefore be used with caution; and

- where lethal measures are necessary to manage an elephant or group of elephants or to manage the size of elephant populations, these should be undertaken with circumspection.

And the standard itself is that: Culling may be used to reduce the size of an elephant population subject to due consideration of all other population management options.

I want to emphasise that each proposed intervention will have to be part of a site-specific integrated management plan that is subject to stakeholder consultation and approval by the Minister or relevant MEC as the case may be.

- Ladies and gentlemen, the Draft Norms and Standards we are laying before you today for comment are based on the best available information and on the apparent consensus between those with extensive scientific knowledge of elephants and those whose opinions are informed by a simple awareness of what is right and wrong.
- I am deeply grateful to the many stakeholders in civil society and government, who have invested their time and intellect to guide the compilation of these Draft Norms and Standards. I look forward to their continued engagement on the matter.

The Draft Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa will be published in the *Government Gazette* on Friday 2 March 2007. I encourage all stakeholders to study them carefully and to submit their comments to the Department by 4 May 2007. As in the consultative process leading to the publication of this draft, all inputs will be carefully considered before the Norms and Standards are finalised and promulgated.

Finally, I want to emphasise that the Draft Norms and Standards merely represent a new chapter in the ongoing debate about elephant management. Our department does not pretend that this will be the final word. Their adoption will not be a 'victory' for any given position; nor will it immediately lead to the wholesale slaughter of elephants anywhere.

They are, in our view, a timely measure to ensure that we start on the journey towards an improved understanding of the complex dynamic between elephants and humans, and within eco-systems."

NOTE: The Draft Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa will be published in the *Government Gazette* on Friday 2 March 2007 for 60 days. Stakeholders should submit written comments by 4 May 2007 to: The Director-General, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Private Bag X447, PRETORIA, 0001. For Attention: Mrs Thea Carroll. Enquiries should be directed to Mrs Thea Carroll Tel. (012) 310 3799; tcarroll@deat.gov.za, or fax number (012) 320 7026.

ANNUAL GAME CENSUS

Visitors to Addo Elephant National Park in March may wonder for what purpose the green and yellow helicopter is buzzing around the park.

The SANParks helicopter, along with park management and staff from the SANParks game capture unit, will conduct the annual game census.

The game census is a valuable management tool. By counting various wildlife species from the air, park management gains an insight into how populations have fluctuated from the previous year's count, as well as other information about the animals in the park.

The game capture unit will also be involved in translocating a male black rhino to the Darlington area of the park.

HONORARY RANGERS' GOLF DAY 18 MAY

The Honorary Rangers of the Addo Elephant National Park are once again organising their Annual Golf Day. This year it will be held on Friday, 18th May at the Humewood Golf Club in Port Elizabeth. It promises to be an exciting day with the Humewood golf course still in excellent condition after the SA National Championships at the end of last year and with the magnificent prizes on offer. The value of all these prizes and others makes it one of the most prestigious golf days in the Eastern Cape.

In keeping with the "Wild" theme of the golf day, the popular venison spitbraai and salads will be served at the prize-giving.

There are still some places in the field to enter a 4 ball at R900 per team. Tees and greens are also available for sponsorship. As always, donations of prizes are also very welcome.

All funds raised will be used for the further improvement of facilities and conservation support work at the Addo Elephant National Park, the prime tourism destination in the Eastern Cape.

For further information please contact Nicky Bosman at nbosman@nmmu.ac.za or by phone on 0823364471.

News from South African National Parks...

First Cheetah Released in Mountain Zebra National Park

Tuesday, 20th of February 2007, saw the release of cheetah in Mountain Zebra National Park, situated near Cradock in the Eastern Cape, marking the culmination of over ten years of a joint public-private conservation initiative.

The two cheetahs, donated by the De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust, are the first large predators to be introduced to the Park.

"The introduction of cheetah will restore the predator-prey balance as well as enrich biodiversity in Mountain Zebra National Park," said Lucius Moolman, Regional Manager.

Moolman added that the introduction of the two male cheetahs would be followed by the introduction of four more cheetahs into the park within the next six months.

The introduction of cheetah represents the climax of an expansion and re-introduction programme that has been made possible by the fund-raising efforts of the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and other organizations such as the Barbara Delano Foundation, WildAid, Sasol Limited and Vesta Medicines.

David Shepherd initiated the fund-raising effort in 1996 with the donation of two paintings, which raised well over one million rand towards park expansion, thanks to the efforts of SABC's 50/50 programme which broadcasted this story.

Funds raised were used to purchase land - nine properties in total - to expand the 6 536-hectare national park to 28 412 hectares. South African National Parks matched all funds that were raised by the private organizations.

Expansion of Mountain Zebra National Park was driven by the aim to reintroduce species like the critically endangered black rhino, as well as buffalo, gemsbok and large predators.

Buffalo were reintroduced in 1998, followed by black rhino and gemsbok in 2002. The increase of these animal populations is testament to the success of the reintroductions, with the buffalo population increasing from an original 24 to 124 today.

Preparation for the release of cheetah included the construction of a 72-kilometre long predator-proof fence around 21 031 hectares of the park.

Calling for Nominations for the 2007 Kudu Awards

The Kudu Awards is an initiative that aims to recognise external stakeholders for their contributions and efforts in making South African National Parks the custodian of choice for the national parks system of South Africa.

Candidates can be nominated according to the following categories:

1. CORPORATE CONTRIBUTION TO CONSERVATION AWARD

- Business Partner of the Year
- Individual Contribution
- Corporate Contribution - Profit Making Institutions
- Corporate Contribution - Non-Profit Making Institutions

This award is given to organisations/companies/persons that have made significant contributions to conservation, whether through the awarding of land, funds, human resources, any contributions in kind or have entered in a business relationship with SANParks.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA CONTRIBUTION TO CONSERVATION AWARD

There are two awards in this category as follows:

- Best Journalist (Across All Media)

- Best Publication/Programme/Website

This award is given to (conservation/environmental) journalists that have been considered to have conducted their reporting in a socially responsible manner and have also given extensive and balanced reporting on conservation related matters.

3. COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION TO CONSERVATION AWARD

There are two awards in this category as follows:

- Community Contributor to Conservation
- Honorary Ranger of the Year

This award is given to an individual/group/project that has advanced the cause of sustainable conservation of our biodiversity and cultural heritage in their communities.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION/CAPACITY BUILDING AWARD

This award shall be given to an educator/group of educators who have contributed to educational programmes that further the conservation of our biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Deadline for Nominations: 2 April 2007

Nomination forms available at all national parks or www.sanparks.org

DID YOU KNOW?

✂ You can help purchase a webcam for Addo Elephant National Park by making a donation online at www.sanparks.org

✂ You can have your say or simply read what others have to say on our website forums. Visit www.sanparks.org/forums

✂ You can check availability of accommodation in any of the 20 South African National Parks by clicking on the link below, then choosing the park and rest camp you wish to investigate: www.sanparks.org/tourism/availability/default.php

The information is updated once a day at 08h00. This will save you time when making your booking. To book, email reservations@sanparks.org or Tel: +27 (0)12 4289111.

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