



Photo: Sandra Mac Fadyen: Geo-Informatics Analyst, SANParks

Donation brings latest technology to Kruger's rangers

A R300,000 donation spread out over three years is helping keep high technology in action in the heart of the Kruger National Park's veld. With the help of the Honorary Rangers, Thubelisha Homes recently presented a cheque for their first instalment of R100,000 in aid of the CyberTracker programme to Kruger's executive director, Dr Bandile Mkhize.

It has been more than five years since the first field ranger ventured out into Kruger's wild areas equipped with a hand-held computer designed to record sightings in the veld, and since then the nifty CyberTracker computers have become more and more indispensable to Kruger's staff. However, the wear and tear of life in the veld and improvements in technology means that many of the existing units need to be replaced. With the new funds, the latest units with bluetooth technology and improved functioning can now be purchased for Kruger's rangers.

"We are very grateful to Thubelisha Homes for this wonderful donation, because it means that my ranger colleagues and I can more effectively continue with our vital role of patrolling the areas of the KNP under our control," said Louis Olivier, one of Kruger's most experienced rangers and regional ranger for the park's northern Nxanatseni region.

After field trials in 2000/1, a 2003 donation enabled each of the 22 ranger sections in the park to have their own CyberTracker unit, which

the field rangers take with them while on patrol. It is these units that are now in need of replacement.

Each CyberTracker unit has a GPS system linked to a palm computer. The computer can be used by illiterate people, as it has a series of icons specially tailored to situations encountered in the bush. The field rangers record information ranging from the area covered by routine patrols, poaching activities, the amount of water available at waterholes, fence line breakages, sightings of rare game, and fire mapping. The rangers are also roped into scientific research programmes, recording the distribution of alien invasive species, the location of beehives, the presence of archaeological remains, wild dog monitoring and many others.

The section rangers download the information from the CyberTracker unit to their personal computers at the end of a patrol, and later email it to Kruger's scientific services. The information is used by KNP management in planning section patrols for area-integrity management; as an early warning system for disease outbreaks; in order to identify trends in exit and entry points for poachers; the management and control of invasive species as well as reporting fence-breaks to the veterinary department for animal health purposes.

Maps of CyberTracker data of Big Five sightings are also posted on the Sanparks website, www.sanparks.org



Cybertracker excellence award 2006: Tshokwane ranger station



Steven Whitfield, Tshokwane section ranger, giving Kevin Duncan, chief executive officer of Thubelisha Homes a demonstration of the Cybertracker.

The section that showed the most improvement from 2005 to 2006, in using the Cybertracker: Crocodile Bridge.