Overall visitors to the Frontier Region’s parks increased by 8.8% year-on-year. The total number of guests to Addo Elephant, Camdeboo, Garden Route, Karoo and Mountain Zebra National Parks was 945 894 between April 2017 and March 2018, up from 869 292 the previous financial year.

Addo Elephant National Park had the highest increase in visitors, tallying a 15% growth from 263 585 to 305 510. Slightly over half of these were international tourists – 158 162 (52%), with 146 091 South Africans (47%) while 1 257 visitors from SADC countries made up the remainder.

Park Manager, Nick de Goede, says “We are elated with these statistics. Not only does it tell us that the Park is a destination of choice for so many people, but that confidence both in the area and in the country is picking up. Our staff work exceptionally hard all year round to ensure that all our visitors receive excellent customer service. They do so under extreme conditions at times, as catering to the needs of all these people is no mean feat.”

Mountain Zebra National Park welcomed over 30,000 visitors through its gates over the past financial year. The increase from 27 965 to 31 210 accounted for a 10% increase in guests to the Park. Dissected into provinces, visitors from the Eastern Cape made up the majority – 65% or 16,411, followed by the Western Cape’s 4,013 or 16%.

Park Manager, Roland Januarie, says they are excited to see an increase in the popularity of the Park, especially among South Africans. “In a country so rich in the number of game reserves available for locals to choose from, what sets one apart from the others can make all the difference. One of the stand-out qualities which makes Mountain Zebra unique is our cheetah tracking activity, during which guests get to experience getting close to these unique creatures on foot, in their natural habitat. The smaller size of the Park and the variety and number of species almost always guarantees good sightings, coupled with our magnificent views, also gives us an edge,” says Januarie.

Garden Route National Park saw an increase in visitor numbers from 494 632 to 528 619, a seven percent growth. Park Manager, Paddy Gordon, says, “A large contributor to this is the increase in day visitors to the Stormsriver section of the Tsitsikamma National Park. The suspension bridge remains a popular attraction with views into the mystical Bloukrans canyon, steep cliffs and unspoilt coastline. A number of activities had been specifically designed to give visitors that ‘explorer’ experience of venturing into the canyon by boat or paddling in on canoes. An unexpected attraction is the temporary marquee which offers meals in close proximity to the spectacular crashing waves that are so definitive of the Tsitsikamma coastline.”

Camdeboo National Park notched up a five percent increase in visitors during this period in comparison to the same time in 2016/17, with a total of 43,543 guests to the Park, up from 41,432 previously. The Park offers only camping, caravanning and a small tented camp in the line of overnight accommodation, which translates into much higher day visitor numbers compared to overnight guests – at 91% and nine percent respectively.

“Given the fact that the Park practically surrounds the town of Graaff-Reinet, with all its B&Bs and other accommodation offerings, we are not surprised by our day versus overnight figures. We have always worked in harmony with all the tourism establishments in town and do not wish to compete with one another,” continues Mjadu.
Dan Dalton

Many thanks,
made aware of this.
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The next morning he was there at 07h00 to carry and load me into our car
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Compliment of the month:
Camdeboo
On Wednesday 14 March I slipped and fell at the Lakeview Tented Camp in
Camdeboo National Park. I incurred a severe injury by severing my quadricep
from my knee and was unable to walk. My wife contacted the former Duty
Manager, Nomonde, who had since moved to Kruger National Park. She
contacted Alan Booyzen who was at our tent within half an hour. She also
followed up to make sure he had arrived.

He deserves the highest praise and commendation possible. At 21h00 he
arrived – concerned, caring and extremely sympathetic. He assisted/carried
me to a bakkie and took us to easily in Graniet Region. He stayed with us
patiently until after 01h30 in the morning and took us back to camp, now 02h00
in the morning.

The next morning he was there at 07h00 to carry and load me into our car
for my wife’s long drive back to Durban. He really and honestly requires the
highest commendation and reward for going more than the extra mile during
our very traumatic experience. Please ensure he and his Camp Manager are
made aware of this.

Many thanks,
Dan Dalton

More Green Flags for GRNP hiking trails
An additional four hiking trails in the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP),
received Green Flag accreditation from the Hiking Organisation of Southern Africa (HOSA). This brings
the number of accredited hiking trails to 18 in the GRNP. Twelve are in the Tsitsikamma section of the
Park, two in the Knysna section and the recent four in the Wilderness section. The four trails include the
Half-collard Kingfisher trail (9.6km), Dune Mole Rat Trail (8.3km), Woodville Big Tree (3km) and the
Circles in the Forest (3.4km).

More people are walking trails in Knysna, Wilderness and Tsitsikamma. A total of 667 people walked
hiking trails in Knysna during the Easter Weekend.The Garden of Eden had the most walkers (266),
the King Edward Big tree (140), Kranshoek (132), Diepwalle (70) and Perdekop (59). Two of Knysna’s
hiking trails (Pondok in Harkerville and the Elephant route in Diepwalle) received Green Flag status
accreditation by HOSA back in 2015.

About 482 people walked the Half-collard Kingfisher trail in Wilderness during the Easter-Weekend
compared to 356 last Easter. The steady increase in the number of people walking in the national park
can be attributed to the Garden Route Festival over the same period where numerous SANParks
hiking trails were among 52 hiking trails to experience in the Region. People are also walking trails in
groups and are including hiking as one of numerous activities to do in the Park.

Progress of hiking trails in Knysna after last year’s fires - readiness for the Knysna
Oyster Festival (July 2018)

Harkerville Trail
The trail was re-opened in December 2017 pending the recovery of the burnt area. However, the
coastal portion of the trail is still closed. An alternative scenic route was opened along the coastal ridge.
Bookings for the trail are open.

Kranshoek Trail
The trail is still closed, with maintenance work currently underway. About 90% of the route is
complete, but rebuilding and rehabilitation of the route is underway.

Kranshoek Viewpoint
Currently still closed and not accessible to visitors as yet until management and scientists have finalised
urgent deliverables pertaining to the area. The Green Flag status system oscillated by the Hiking Organisation of Southern Africa (HOSA) ensures hiking trails meet standards in terms of trail outlay, accommodation, facilities and service, as well as the conservation of natural resources.

Professor’s Letter

Dear Jessica and Nerina

Just a quick note to say that the first phase of the Knysna estuary monitoring and
data collection proceeded very smoothly. SANParks was extremely helpful and
assisted one of the sub-teams with the use of a boat and driver on Easter Monday –
this was really wonderful. The next phase will probably be in September - some
of us are off to Shanghai in June to perform a similar exercise there.

Once again, thank you for the excellent cooperation and assistance. I attach a
photograph. Can you please share this with the local staff there?

Best regards

Professor Mike Meadows
Department of Environmental & Geographical Science
University of Cape Town

Karoo National Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, together
with Deon van Eeden from PG Glass Beaufort West, proudly
showing off the sponsored glass casing housing the stuffed
lion in the Park’s Interpretive Centre.

Karoo’s stuffed lion now
even better preserved

Karoo National Park’s management would like to thank PG Glass Beaufort West and
GSA George for the sponsorship of the glass case in which the stuffed lion in
its Interpretive Centre is preserved.

The lion is one of two, one male and one female, which were introduced to Karoo from
Marakele National Park in October 2015. They were released into the boma to
settle the wandering lion, dubbed “Sylvester”, in an attempt to settle him after
his initial escape from the Park earlier that year. Unfortunately, the male died
before they could be released from the boma.

A full mount of the deceased lion was made by local taxidermists, Ricus and
Waldo de Vries, paid for by the SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Karoo Region.

Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, says before the lion was encased in the glass,
tourists would touch and some would even climb on it. So for the long-term
durability thereof, a decision was taken to enclose it. “We approached Deon van
Eeden from PG Glass Beaufort West for a quote, who in turn offered to sponsor
the project in conjunction with GSA George. For this we are eternally thankful
to Deon and Andre van Greunen from PG Glass and GSA George,” said van der
Walt.
Addo Honorary Rangers visit schools

Addo Honorary Rangers visit schools

One of the members of SANParks Honorary Rangers, Addo region, Carole Baldie has been visiting schools in Nelson Mandela Bay over the past two months under the PEAP (Public Education and Awareness Project) banner.

These visits to primary and high schools create awareness and educate the learners on the importance of conservation, the role of the SANParks Honorary Rangers, especially in Addo Elephant National Park and the impact poaching has on wildlife in our national parks.

Carole heads up a very strong team that focuses on educating and informing the youth and communities around Addo Elephant National Park on conservation issues.

The schools visited last month were Laerskool Verkenner and Newton Park Technical High School.

‘Desired state’ of the Garden Route National Park

‘Desired state’ of the Garden Route National Park

The picturesque 175 000ha Garden Route National Park (GRNP) consists of the previously proclaimed Tsitsikamma and Wilderness National Parks, the Krynauw Lakes Area, as well as the indigenous forest and fynbos areas previously managed by the Department of Forestry. The GRNP started stakeholder meetings in mid-April to develop a ‘desired state’ as part of its management plan review.

The ‘desired state’ sets out the strategic direction for the Park and consists of a mission and high level objectives to help achieve the mission. A National Park management plan encourages a shared vision of managing for both current and future generations. The objective of a management plan is to ensure the protection, conservation and management of the protected area concerned in a manner consistent with the objectives of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEM: PAA).

On Thursday 12 April a session about the ‘desired state’ was held with staff in the Garden Route National Park. This was a day after workshops were held in Tsitsikamma, Krynauw and Wilderness respectively. Staff gave input into what they considered as attributes of the Park, threats, future vision and high level objectives to guide the future management plan of the GRNP for the next 10 years.

Members of the public, organisations, stakeholders and interested parties are requested to register on the SANParks website: https://www.sanparks.org/conservation/park_man/forms/reg_form.php

This will assist the project team to keep in touch with all the registered stakeholders regarding future meetings, announcements and feedback.

Addo supports the Help a Girl Child Project

Addo supports the Help a Girl Child Project

Addo Elephant National Park’s People and Conservation Department showed their support of the national Help a Girl Child Project by handing over black bags full of sanitary towels to girls at the Samkelwe Secondary School in the nearby village of Nomathamsanqa.

Staff took the initiative of collecting sanitary towels by placing donation boxes in the Park’s reception area and in the offices for guests and staff to contribute to during February and March. A total of 250 packets of sanitary towels were collected during this time.

The Help a Girl Child Project is aimed at assisting teenage girls by keeping them in school, as in many disadvantaged areas girls miss out on going to school when they are menstruating.

As this is an ongoing project, Addo’s staff aims to cover all eight communities around the Park throughout the course of the year. So next time you visit the Park, please help a girl child by donating a pack of sanitary towels.
The abiotic and biotic components of aquatic ecosystems as well as the conservation of freshwater fish. Aquatic scientists research and monitor the conservation of estuarine ecosystems, long-term monitoring in rivers.

Fish face a number of threats and physical barriers such as structures that make it difficult to move from one location to the next. These structures also have a potential to disrupt the natural flow of rivers, which is critical for fish propagation. Free-flowing rivers help with water purification, food circulation, and pollution control whilst protecting against storm surges and rising sea levels.

SANParks People and Conservation Officers joined the ‘Outdoor Man’ at the Garden Route Mall from 19 April to raise awareness about the role of National Parks in conserving fish species, wildlife, sea life and flora. They also emphasised rules and regulations guiding fishing activities in water bodies in the Garden Route, especially in the national park.

This is not the only initiative towards safeguarding fish species for current and future generations. SANParks works with various partners to create a conducive environment for fish to thrive in rivers, estuaries and the sea. These include the removal of invasive alien species in riparian areas to release more water to flow in rivers.

Aquatic scientists research and monitor the conservation of estuaries ecosystems, long-term monitoring of abiotic and biotic components of aquatic ecosystems as well as the conservation of freshwater fish.

One recent example of a management intervention to protect fish and improve the quality of water was in the Wilderness lakes area, where a dredging operation in the Serpentine channels could bring the necessary turnaround to negative changes in water chemistry and fish populations that have been observed from long-term monitoring.

Meanwhile, in Addo, the celebrations started early for the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) freshwater team, with Professor Olaf Weyl giving a presentation on ‘The secret life of slippery, slimy eels’ and ‘Conservation of the endangered Eastern Cape Redfin Minnow’ to SANParks Rangers and Management. The presentation was aimed at creating awareness on the interplay between facilitating migrations while ensuring that resident conservation priority species are not negatively impacted.

Of the four species of freshwater eels that occur in South Africa, primary focus was given to the two African species - the African Longfin Eel (Anguilla mossambica) and the Giant Mottled Eel (Anguilla marmorata) - which rely on the unhindered passages through the rivers to reproduce. However, as a result of river barriers (dams, weirs, and sluices) in streams that flow through the Park, their access to headwaters has been compromised. These barriers, however, also prevent alien predatory fish from accessing vulnerable headwater populations of threatened fishes. Conservation actions therefore need to carefully weigh up the benefits of connectivity to eels against the potential impacts on the endangered Eastern Cape Redfin Minnow.

After the presentation, Professor Weyl and the SANParks team led a field trip up the Wit River to look at some migration barriers and meet some fish. Despite the gloomy weather, the day was fruitfully wrapped up with informative conversations about conservation and ecology.

The SAIAB and SANParks’s team setting out a seine net for data collection.

Connecting fish, people and rivers

24 hours in Karoo National Park

It is easy to drive through Beaufort West and pass it off as a quick overnight stop. However, Karoo National Park is changing this perception. About 500km north of Cape Town and 1000km south of Johannesburg lies the gem of the Great Karoo. The Karoo is not only for the environmental, but birding and archaeological enthusiasts as well. Added to that, though - it is a tranquil holiday destination which requires more than just an overnight stop to take in all that it has to offer. However, if 24 hours is all you have, make your way into the game area but also spend some time in the area around the rest camp.

Here, the wheelchair-friendly Fossil Trail allows visitors to explore the fossil evidence of extinct Karoo wildlife. The fossils, preserved in glass boxes, date back to 250 million years ago. The well-maintained swimming pool at the rest camp is a heaven-sent gift for those sun scorched days. Not only is there this pool for resident guests, but there is another at the Bulkrad picnic site for day visitors.

A visit to Karoo National Park is not complete without a stopover at the Interpretive Centre with its multitude of mounted animals including a life-like lion. The centre provides informative insights into the ecological and cultural history of the Karoo. There’s even a section dedicated to the Park’s infamous lion, Sylvester, and his background. Agricultural equipment once used on farms which now make up the Park are also on display.

Book a night drive and don’t forget to take a jacket along for the cold Karoo nights. In the morning, participate in a guided walk with a knowledgeable guide, who will wax lyrical throughout the walk about the plant, bird and animal life in the Park. If trail running is more your scene, or if you’ve packed your mountain bike, don’t miss a chance to tackle the Sylvester mountain bike trail in the rest camp. Alternatively, keen birders should visit the bird hide just as one enters the rest camp.

So, what was first seen as a convenient stopover between Cape Town and the interior of the country is fast beginning to look more and more like a full-on holiday destination.
The world watched in awe as the South African bowling team won a bronze medal at the recently held Commonwealth Games. Australia and New Zealand have the quickest greens which meant an added advantage for the home team (Aussies). Chris Patton, dubbed our King Protea in the Garden Route since his move to work and live in the Garden Route, made it to the national team to represent South Africa.

“The pressure was on,” narrates Patton boldly. “The conditions were a lot less favourable than in South Africa because of the pitch but the team went on to win bronze,” he said.

Patton said the camaraderie between the peers (some 160 South African athletes) was great. “The journey began with a dinner in Johannesburg before departing for Australia. There was also a team building session with Natalie du Toit and others,” explained Chris.

Patton kept his eye on the ball but said he was disappointed with his last match. “At the awards, I had a hollow feeling that I didn’t play my best games. I had played a whole lot better against the Australian team,” said Patton.

Where to now for Chris!

Although he won bronze in 2018 and silver in 2015, he is aiming for gold at his next big game in George later this month. “The national championships will be held in the Eden District at the end of May.

“I plan to frame the one t-shirt as a memento. The other will be given to the bowling club and the other I will wear at various public speaking events I have this month,” he chuckled. He juggles his many roles well as the current President of Bowling for Persons with Disability, his family and demanding work.

Chris does not only advise SANParks on universal access for tourism products but is the content editor and works extensively with interpretation and visitor manuals for the organisation.

Chris is called Crispy by national colleagues and friends, while his Garden Route colleagues refer to him as the ‘King Protea’.

By George!

Another golf day!

The SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Karoo region cordially invites you to join them for a golf day at the Kingswood Golf Estate, home of the Sally Little Signature Championship course next month.

There are thousands of rands worth of prizes to be won, so be sure to come and join in on the fun.

The golf day takes place on Friday 1 June at 08:00 at a cost of R500 per person, which includes course fees, a golf cart to share and a light meal.

For further details or to book, please contact Ferdie Nortje on 082 058 9303 or Flippie Verwey on 083 504 4496.