In this edition:  
Parks transformed into winter wonderlands

From the Editor’s desk

Welcome to the last quarterly edition of Park-thusiasts as it’s become known over the past year-and-a-half. As from next month, we will be moving to a new monthly publication – bringing you fresh news on a more regular basis. It will, of course, be shorter than what you’ve become accustomed to, but at least you’ll be more up-to-date on happenings in our parks going forward.

In this edition we have a number of feature pages, bringing you news from what we got up to on Mandela Day (pg 2), our World Ranger Day activities (pg 3) and our snow-covered peaks at the end of August (pg 4). We also have our regular news pages from each of the parks, showing off just a small amount of what our staff members have been getting involved in the past quarter.

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I’ve enjoyed producing this publication for you every few months, and I’m sure doing it more regularly will be just as much fun! Until then, happy reading, as always!

Regards,

Fayroush Ludick
Regional Communications Manager
Mandela Day activities around Addo Elephant National Park was a joint venture between Park staff and BSP teams.

Camdeboo National Park’s Rangers and General Workers spent Mandela Day building a fence around the Maimanedini Old Age Centre at Grace in Umasizakhe. At the same time, BSP and office staff did a cleanup in and around Kroonvale, filling numerous black bags.

BSP contractors, their beneficiaries and Addo staff spent the day cleaning up the areas around Enon/Bersheba and along the buffer zone between the Park and Nomathamsanqa, picking up litter as they went along. Ward councilors and community development workers were extremely grateful for the assistance.

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Mountain Zebra National Park

MZNP staff spent Mandela Day at the Vukasebenza Shelter for Cradock’s needy, where they donated foodstuff and showed off their cooking and serving skills. Vukasebenza is a non-profit organisation which was established seven years ago after a survey conducted by a number of churches found that there was a dire need to establish this type of shelter. In return for picking up and bringing litter to the shelter to be recycled, up to 150 of Cradock’s poorest get food from here on a daily basis.

Vukasebenza not only focuses on recycling and feeding people, but it also offers computer classes, wood work and gardening skills.

Sawula Mbonambi

Shelter Manager, Gussie Botha, said “Please accept our heartfelt gratitude for the great donation of vegetables, meat and food. The food was highly appreciated by our daily visitors to the shelter – the poorest of the poor. The MZNP staff did a great job preparing a very nice stew and rice. They also showed their skills at serving the food”.

MZNP recognised that one day was not enough for doing good, so a week later, on 23 July, 11 BSP beneficiary teams (Working on Land and Working for Water) went to the Lukhanyo Adult Centre in Lingelihle and the JA Calata High School to provide assistance where needed. Lukhanyo is a centre for disabled adults where they are taught skills like carpentry and sewing. The WfW teams helped in the garden and cleaning in the centre. Meanwhile, at JA Calata, they pruned trees and picked up litter both inside and outside the school grounds.
World Ranger Day celebrated at Addo Elephant National Park

Rangers from the four national parks in the region converged on Addo Elephant National Park to commemorate World Ranger Day.

World Ranger Day is observed on the 31st of July each year. It is the day to commemorate the many rangers killed or injured in the line of duty and to celebrate rangers and the work they do to protect the world’s natural and cultural treasures. World Ranger Day is promoted by the 54 member associations of the International Ranger Federation (IRF). The first World Ranger Day was observed in 2007 on the 15th anniversary of the founding of the IRF.

SANParks’ rangers from Addo Elephant, Camdeboo, Karoo and Mountain Zebra National Parks put on an impressive display of their skills, including aerial surveys, ground patrols, dealing with suspected poachers, first aid on a gunshot victim and vehicle stop and searches. Senior members from the parks, as well as a number of Honorary Rangers from the region attended the day’s festivities.

On a daily basis throughout the world, as in South Africa, rangers put their lives in danger to take care of and protect our natural environment. With the current onslaught of rhino poaching in South Africa, they are usually the last line of defense between a rhino and a poacher.

South Africa is home to approximately 22,000 white and black rhinoceros. The South African population is one of the last viable rhino populations in the world, which makes its survival crucial. Over 600 rhino’s have already perished this year in South Africa. Thankfully, SANParks in the region has not suffered any losses as yet.

Regional General Manager, Dries Engelbrecht, said “We remember our injured and fallen colleagues the world over not only today, but every morning as we get ready to carry on fighting for the same things they did. We also, on days like today, thank the rangers doing duty by protecting the biodiversity which we one day hope to leave behind for our children to enjoy. Even though threats increase daily, they are all here because they have a passion for what they do and believe in this very worthy cause – protecting our environment for generations to follow.”

“We must also not forget about our voluntary Honorary Rangers. These individuals volunteer their free time and effort and don’t get paid a cent for the hours they do assisting our rangers out in the field. What they do, whether over weekends or at night, is simply for the love of conservation. For that, we thank you all,” concluded Engelbrecht.

Rangers from our four parks converged on Addo Elephant National Park today to commemorate World Ranger Day. They put on a simulated rhino poaching incident.
(S)NO(W) JOKE!

Two days before the advent of spring, winter gave one last blast to show that she was still around. When colleagues at Mountain Zebra, Camdeboo and Karoo National Parks woke up on the morning of Friday 29 August, they found that the peaks in their parks had turned white overnight!
Addo targets the littlies on World Environment Day
By Sam Pinzi

Thirty-three- to five-year-olds spent the day at Addo Elephant National Park on World Environment Day at the beginning of June.

The learners, from the Khanyisa Educare centre in the nearby Moses Mabida Township, were taught that even their tiny little hands could make a difference in caring for our environment.

After a short talk by the Park’s Nature Conservation students in an attempt to raise their awareness about the environment and the significance of the day, the youngsters did what most of them like best – colouring in. Their picture was that of many different little hands holding on to the earth, illustratively showing them that the survival of the environment and the earth is in their hands.

To practically show the little ones how this is possible, they were divided into three groups, given black bags and taken to the Park’s day visitors’ picnic site for a clean-up activity. Here they picked up and filled their bags with all kinds of litter like cooldrink cans, packets and sweet papers. The purpose of the activity was to show them that even their tiny hands can make a difference in the environment, and that they are responsible for it.

They were then encouraged to perform the same activity at home and at their school. After a long day of learning and cleaning up, they were taken on a game drive through the Park before heading back home.

Honorary Rangers on litter patrol
By Nicky Bosman

Addo’s Honorary Rangers regularly deploy on litter patrols within the Park - which may have been blown into the Park by strong winds from its neighbouring areas. The litter is collected to ensure that no animals mistakenly eat it, which could lead to death.

On 9 August, 15 members assembled at the Park’s Reception office and made their way to Korhaanvlakte to pick up litter along the fence and in the Addo thicket. They were accompanied by three rangers, who acted as ‘guardians’ to keep them safe from any predators or potentially dangerous animals while they were going about filling bags.

By the end of the morning 22 large hessian bags of litter were collected. The bulk of the litter included frozen chicken bags, polystyrene in various shapes and sizes, chip packets and plastic bags of various sizes.
Camdeboo supports Eco-school’s Fashion Talent Show
Camdeboo National Park supported Eco-school, Union High School, with their Fashion Talent Show on 28 August – a fitting partnership as the theme centered around recycled outfits. The Park’s People & Conservation Officers, Rosemary Scheepers and Zimkhita Zungula, designed a unique outfit for the evening, which was proudly modeled by Receptionist, Janine Masimela.

Fishing competition benefits the needy
By Rosemary Scheepers
The proceeds of this year’s annual Nqweba Carp Classic were donated to the Camdeboo Hospice. Generous and very welcome donations in the form of 60 carp and one barbell were donated after weigh-in 20 July.

Forty fishermen participated in the overnight event, which was sponsored by the Camdeboo Angling Club and Swancraft.

The winners of the competition were: First prize went to Thinus Verwey with a carp of 3.59kg, Patrick Goltz was the runner up with a barbell of 1.1kg while Rudy Prinsloo came in third with a 3.2kg carp. The junior category was won by Enrico Claassen, thanks to a 2.5kg carp.

School holiday fun
By Rosemary Scheepers
Camdeboo National Park hosted a successful June/July school holiday programme recently.

The programme ran over five days from 30 June to until 4 July, at the Park’s Environmental Education Centre. Open to all children from the ages of eight to 14 years, each day had a particular theme – Grassy Monday, Nutty Nature Tuesday, Teedefontein during a guided walk on Nutty Nature Tuesday, Exploring Insect Thursday and Funky Fun Friday.

P&C staff members, Rosemary Wilson and Zimkhita Zungula, along with two Conservation Students, Mark Kappiera and Matthew Barnard, entertained the youngsters with fun, yet informative games, talks, presentation and walks.

Throughout all the activities, the children got to experience nature as well as learn about the importance of conserving nature in a fun way. The week’s activities ended with a lovely braai and prize giving for all the participants.

Ensuring a good night’s sleep for Graaff-Reinet learners
South African National Parks (SANParks) delivered on its vision of ‘Connecting to Society’ at the official handover of 80 beds and mattresses at Spandau High School’s girls’ dormitory in Graaff-Reinet on 12 August.

The town of Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape finds itself surrounded by Camdeboo National Park. Park staff realised the dire need for this necessity, when, on a routine visit to the dormitory earlier this year, they noticed the lack of proper mattresses the learners were forced to make use of. They were sleeping on up to four or five thin mattresses at a time, many with numerous holes in them, forcing the children to improvise by stacking one upon another and another in order to get a good night’s sleep.

Park management then wrote a letter of motivation for the furniture to SANParks’ Corporate Social Investment (CSI) department at Head Office. After a site visit to the school to inspect the exact extent of the problem, the go-ahead was given for the purchase of the beds.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, Park Manager, Peter Burdett, said, “We all know how important a good night’s sleep is, and more especially so for our children. Sleep is the power source that keeps one’s mind alert and calm. Every night, sleep recharges the brain’s battery. Sleeping well increases brain power just as weight lifting builds stronger muscles, because doing so increases your attention span and allows you to be physically relaxed and mentally alert at the same time. Then you are at your personal best.”

The project, valued at R125 000, will go a long way towards improving the learning and development of learners at the school. “We hope that today’s handover will go a long way in seeing these youngsters excel in their education and flourish in their day-to-day lives,” Burdett continued.

Elizabeth Mhlongo, Senior General Manager – CSI, said “As part of our new positioning and living up to our vision of ‘South African National Parks Connecting to Society’, SANParks initiated a CSI programme as a way to align with and contribute towards social development.”

“...In partnership with government departments, municipalities, local communities and other key stakeholders, SANParks is investing resources in the establishment of legacy projects in communities, particularly in rural areas where our national parks are located;” Mhlongo continued.

The official handover of the beds at Spandau High School is an indication of the promise SANParks has made to ‘Connect to Society’, and follows other projects handed over in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape – with the handover of a computer laboratory in Paterson close to Addo Elephant National Park last year.

“Through these programmes and many others, we will continue to develop reciprocal relationships between protected areas and neighbouring communities, making our national parks a true mirror of our society’s environmental values,” Mhlongo concluded.

Nqweba Carp Classic
Claassen, winner of the junior category in this year’s Nqweba Carp Classic.

Children showing off their certificates of attendance after the prize giving on Funky Fun Friday.
Kids in Parks
Karoo National Park hosted another successful Kids in Parks Programme this year, hosting a total of 499 learners and 20 educators from 10 schools in the region. St Matthews Primary School learners while on a walk at Grantham.

This year the Park decided to award a “winning school” prize. The schools were judged on aspects such as the punctuality of the learners, their discipline, co-operation, participation and general behaviour and tidiness of their rooms and the bathrooms. The winners were from Restvale Primary School.

Rooivalle lookout upgraded
By Esna van Zyl
Karoo National Park’s Honorary Rangers recently upgraded one of the Park’s lookout points to the tune of R24 000.

Over the years, the path at Rooivalle began to erode as a result of the many visitors who visited the site to enjoy the Park’s scenic views. The Park boasts one of the largest concentrations of breeding pairs of Verreaux’s eagles in the country, and many fortunate visitors have seen breeding pairs from the Rooivalle lookout point.

The erosion caused the runoff to the lookout point to become dangerous for visitors, especially for older and disabled people. This prompted the Honorary Rangers to fund a contractor to build cement steps from natural stone to improve access to the lookout point. They also constructed a railing along the new pathway to assist the elderly and disabled, and avoid any possible injuries. The existing security fence around the lookout was also improved by extending it to prohibit visitors from clambering over or around it.

Scooping a top award
Karoo National Park has received a 2014 Certificate of Excellence from the international travel site, TripAdvisor.

TripAdvisor is the world’s largest travel site, enabling travelers to plan and experience the perfect trip. It offers trusted advice from real travelers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features with seamless links to booking tools.

TripAdvisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching nearly 260 million unique monthly visitors, and more than 150 million reviews and opinions covering more than four million accommodations, restaurants and attractions. The sites operate in 41 countries worldwide.

The award forms part of TripAdvisor’s campaign of celebrating hospitality excellence around the world. This prestigious award is based on the quality of reviews and opinions earned on Travel Advisor over the past year and signifies that the Park has consistently earned outstanding feedback from TripAdvisor travellers who have visited this beautiful part of the Karoo.

Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, says, “We are very humbled by this recognition. The certificate is evidence that we have a winning team here at Karoo National Park, and that we are doing something right.”

“From the moment a guest drives up to our front gate, we go all out to make them feel welcome and at home. This trend carries on throughout the Park, whether it be when guests come in contact with any of our staff members, use any of our facilities or participate in activities. The team members all strive to give our visitors the best possible experience while they’re here — some home-grown Karoo hospitality, and it clearly works, as this recognition reaffirms,” says van der Walt.

Running in the wild
A section of the annual Beaufort West Marathon was run through Karoo National Park on 26 July. The 21.1km half marathon is organised by the Beaufort West Municipality, and participants take to the Lammertjiesleegte Loop as part of the event.

The race started and finished at the Rustdene Sports Grounds, with just half of it taking place inside the Park. There was also a 10km run, as well as a 21.1km walk.
Celebrating World Environment Day By Mxolisi Fulumente
Mountain Zebra National Park, in conjunction with the Inxuba Yethemba Munici-
pality, marked World Environment Day on 3 June at the Carinus Primary School in Cradock. This year the day’s theme was “Raise your voice, not the sea level” - in support of the 2014 International Year of Small Islands Development States (SIDS) which is affected by rising sea levels and devastating storms as a result of sustained global warming.

World Environment Day was established in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly as its way of encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment. Since the area does not have small islands or seas, the two institutions aimed to educate dozens of learners about the importance of the day, with special focus on global warming, sustainable consumption and the degradation of natural resources.

The learners were taught that the disappearance of natural resources damages an area and limits its ability to sustain any given population such as trees, sea grass, animals or even people. Often, this damage is the result of beneficial activities performed irresponsibly. Waste water discharged into rivers can alter its salinity, affecting the life cycle of certain species. For example, if fishing is a source of income for a community, not only will the incorrect treatment and disposal of waste water damage natural resources, but it will harm the local economy as well. On the larger scale, natural resources can be impacted to a point where they can no longer be repaired. Damage from deforestation impacts biodiversity, causes soil erosion and limits the farming potential of an area. Deforestation also has an effect on climate change, as a lack of trees will lead to an overabundance of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Additionally, learners and teachers were encouraged to recycle and the day concluded with a clean-up campaign by the learners in and around the school grounds.

Recognising youth with disabilities By Mxolisi Fulumente
Mountain Zebra National Park participated in the Chris Hani Youth Disability Day celebrations on 25 June, organised by the Eastern Cape Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform.

As June was youth month, special focus is given to youth with disabilities on this day. The event, hosted by the Lukhanyo Adult Centre and the Department’s District Office, took place at the Yusubuntu Hall in Cradock.

While the Department provided linen and sewing machines to the Centre, MZNP donated two boxes full of clothing and other items to its residents.

The Park has a long-standing relationship with Lukhanyo. Most recently Park staff planted cabbage, spinach, carrots and other vegetables in its garden on Mandela Day and they cut the Centre’s grass on the sport field so people can make use of it to keep fit and active.

Welcome to the Park!
Daniel van de Vyver (better known as Dan) – Field Guide
Dan, born and bred the Eastern Cape, is completing his MSc on the effects of a lion re-introduction and the resident cheetah population at the Park through Rhodes University. Dan says, “My research has furthered my passion of understanding how and why animals do what they do. Going forward I would like to further my career with SANParks Scientific Services, particularly focusing on large carnivore interactions”.

Charl Lyell – Senior Field Guide
This local, having grown up in Cradock, is happy to be back home after working for several years at private game lodges in the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal, before doing a full-time degree in Nature Conservation at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in George. Asked what attracted him to this field, he says, “I am interested in conservation management, large mammal and endangered species conservation, as well as educating people on conservation issues. I hope to have a successful career within SANParks, particularly within conservation management.”

Refiloe Motsoari – Tourist Student
Refiloe studied hospitality at the South African College for Tourism in 2013. “My inspiration is to work hard and achieve my dreams, which are to excel in the tourism industry. I believe the skills I will be taught while at SANParks will allow me to one day live my dreams”.

Working together against poaching
Mountain Zebra National Park conservation staff formed part of a joint task team over a weekend in August which led to the arrest of five suspected poachers outside Cradock.

The team, under the leadership of the Green Scorpions from the DEDEAT, SANParks and Cradock SAPS stock theft unit, were following up on informa-
tion from the team over a weekend in August which led to the arrest of five suspected poachers outside Cradock. After 34 hours of no sleep, we are reaping the fruit of our joint efforts.”

By Mxolisi Fulumente

Mountain Zebra National Park

People and Conservation Officer, Mxolisi Fulumente took two boxes of donated items from the Park for use at the Lukhanyo Adult Centre.

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