



SANPARKS HONOURS THE GUARDIANS OF CONSERVATION ON WORLD RANGER DAY 2026

Rangers: Guardians of a changing planet – a legacy of courage, service and stewardship



SANParks CEO Hapiloe Sello

SANParks hosted a number of World Ranger Day commemorative events across the country, with the national event hosted at Augrabies Falls National Park on 31st July 2026. The events brought together rangers, conservation partners, government leaders, communities and stakeholders to honour the dedication of those who protect South Africa's natural and cultural heritage. The ceremonies served as

a celebration and a solemn tribute, recognising the courage, professionalism and sacrifice of rangers while remembering colleagues who have lost their lives or sustained injuries in the line of duty. SANParks reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to supporting the ranger profession and strengthening conservation leadership across the country's protected areas. For the past 20 years, World



Ranger Day has been commemorated globally, recognising the dedication and sacrifice of rangers who protect our natural and cultural heritage. As SANParks also commemorates the



The events reinforced the vital role rangers continue to play.

Centenary of Kruger National Park, this year's observance reinforces the critical role rangers continue to play in conserving South Africa's protected areas.

Keynote Address by the Honourable David Maynier: Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

Modern rangers are also the custodians of our natural and cultural heritage

World Ranger Day is a time to recognise the courage, commitment and professionalism of the women and men who dedicate their lives to protecting South Africa's extraordinary natural heritage. It is also a solemn occasion to honour those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty and to acknowledge the families who support them. This year marks twenty years since the International Ranger Federation established World Ranger Day, providing an op-

portunity to reflect on the evolution of the ranger profession and the increasingly important role rangers play in protecting biodiversity, combating environmental crime and strengthening the resilience of our protected areas. As conservation challenges continue to evolve, so too has the role of the modern ranger. Today's rangers are conservation professionals, first responders, educators, mentors and trusted partners to neighbouring communities. Their work extends



Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment David Maynier

new generation to pursue careers in conservation. This publication celebrates the remarkable women rangers whose leadership, resilience and dedication continue to shape the future of conservation in South Africa. Their stories remind us that protecting our environment depends on skilled, committed people who serve with courage and purpose. On this World Ranger Day, we honour those we have lost, celebrate those who serve today, and reaffirm our commitment to those who will carry this responsibility into the future.

Message from the Chairperson

World Ranger Day reminds us that conservation is ultimately about people – those who dedicate their lives to protecting our natural and cultural heritage for future generations. It is a day to celebrate the professionalism and dedication of our rangers, honour those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and recognise the invaluable contribution they make every day.



SANParks Board Chairperson Ms Beryl Ferguson

As we commemorate twenty years of World Ranger Day, we also celebrate the people behind the uniform. This publication shines a spotlight on the remarkable women rangers of SANParks, whose stories reflect courage, resilience, leadership and service. They are breaking barriers, inspiring young South Africans and demonstrating that conser-

vation is strengthened by diversity, inclusion and opportunity. Across our national parks, women rangers are protecting biodiversity, supporting research, engaging communities, ensuring visitor safety and helping to conserve some of the world's most treasured landscapes. Their work reflects the evolving nature of the ranger pro-

fession and the broad range of skills required to meet today's conservation challenges. I hope these inspiring profiles deepen appreciation for the ranger profession and encourage more young women to see conservation as a meaningful career. To every ranger featured in these pages – and to all who serve across our protected areas – thank you for your unwavering commitment to safeguarding South Africa's natural heritage.

Asiphe Ranana: Section Ranger: Agulhas National Park

Asiphe Ranana exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding conservation leader through her dedication, resilience, and commitment to protecting South Africa's natural heritage. As Section Ranger for the Waterford Section of Agulhas National Park, she combines strong academic credentials; a BSc Honours in Environmental Management and a BTech

in Nature Conservation, with extensive operational experience gained through every level of the ranger profession. She provides strategic leadership in biodiversity conservation, wildlife management, and environmental protection while ensuring that the Waterford Section is managed using the principles of Strategic Adaptive Management.

Asiphe is passionate about developing the next generation of conservation professionals. She willingly mentors Work Integrated Learning (WIL) students from Bontebok National Park, sharing her knowledge, building their confidence, and exposing them to the realities, responsibilities, and rewards of a career in conser-



vation. Working in the remote Waterford Section has enabled her to build strong relationships with neighbouring communities and key law enforcement partners. Through effective collaboration with CapeNature, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), and the South African Po-

lice Service (SAPS), she has strengthened coordinated efforts to combat abalone poaching and illegal off-road driving along the coastline, contributing significantly to the protection of sensitive coastal ecosystems. Her leadership was particularly evident during the major Pearly Beach wildfire. Asiphe assumed operational leadership, working alongside the Park Manager and Fire Chief to coordinate her team and implement a structured suppression strategy.

Liezel Wagner: Field Ranger: Garden Route National Park

Liezel Wagner recognised as an outstanding woman ranger whose dedication, resilience, and professionalism have made a significant contribution to conservation in the Garden Route National Park. Working in an open-access protected area presents unique and demanding challenges. Unlike fenced protected areas, the Garden Route National Park requires constant collaboration with stakeholders to achieve conservation objectives. Liezel has consistently demonstrated the ability to navigate these complex relationships with professionalism, in-

tegrity, and respect. Her role spans both terrestrial and marine environments, requiring a diverse range of skills and an understanding of interconnected ecosystems. She contributes to the protection and management of indigenous forests, fynbos, wetlands, estuaries, lakes, rivers, beaches, and marine protected areas, recognising that the health of one ecosystem direct-



ly influences another. Her work supports the protection of the nationally and internationally significant lake systems and estuaries, while contributing to the conservation of biodiversity across the landscape. Her unwavering commitment to protecting the Garden Route National Park's interconnected ecosystems, coupled with her professionalism, integrity, and ability to overcome complex conservation challenges, makes her a highly deserving candidate for this recognition. She embodies the values of SANParks and serves as an exceptional ambassador for women in conservation.

Priscilla Magerman-Bezuidenhout: Park Manager: Ai/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park

Priscilla Magerman-Bezuidenhout was appointed as Park Manager of the Ai/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (ARTP) in April 2023, following a distinguished career of more than 20 years with SANParks. Prior to her appointment, she served in the Socio-Economic Transformation (SET) Department at Namaqua National Park, where she played a significant role in community development, stakeholder engagement, and conservation initiatives that delivered meaningful socio-economic benefits. Her SANParks journey be-

gan in 2003 as a Temporary Socioecologist, focusing on strengthening relationships between protected areas and neighbouring communities. In 2005, she was appointed as Senior People and Conservation Officer, a position she held with distinction for nearly two decades. During this time, she earned widespread recognition for building strong partnerships, advancing community conservation programmes, and

promoting sustainable livelihoods. Priscilla's exceptional contributions have been recognised through four SANParks Chief Executive Awards and six Regional Awards, reflecting her commitment to excellence and transformation. A dedicated lifelong learner, she completed her degree through distance learning while working full-time.



Letlhogonolo Mokopelo: Field Ranger: Augrabies Falls National Park

My conservation journey began in 2015 as a Machine Assistant at the Eco-Furniture Factory under the Working for Water Programme. While working, I pursued and successfully completed a qualification in Nature Conservation, which provided the scientific foundation for my growing passion for environmental stewardship. From 2016 to 2019, I served as an Environmental Monitor under the Biodiversity So-

cial Projects programme, where I gained experience in environmental monitoring, reporting, and community engagement. Between 2019 and 2023, I worked as an Environmental Monitor and Herbarium Assistant, developing strong skills in scientific record-keeping, plant conservation, and biodiversi-



ty management. From 2023 to 2024, I served as a Research Assistant, strengthening my ability to use data and research to support informed conservation decisions. Since 2024, I have proudly served as a Field Ranger, where I contribute to conservation operations and law enforcement. As the only female in my department, I embrace the challenges of the role with resilience and determination. "Let us continue protecting our natural resources. The future of conservation is in our hands."

Sundani Nwaila: Field Ranger: Mapungubwe National Park



Sundani Nwaila began her career as an Environmental Monitor from 2005 to 2014, performing general worker duties in Kruger National Park. In 2014, she was appointed as an Armed Environmental Monitor at Mapungubwe National Park, a role she held until 2018. That same year, she was promoted to Field Ranger at Mapungubwe National

Philile Dlamini: Senior Section Ranger: Addo Elephant National Park

Philile Dlamini is a highly respected conservation leader who consistently demonstrates excellence in protected area management, biodiversity conservation, and team leadership. She leads with professionalism, integrity, and determination, ensuring that conservation objectives are achieved while fostering a positive and supportive working environment. One of Philile's most outstanding qualities is her commitment to mentorship and developing future conservation leaders. She actively invests in the growth and development of junior staff, field rangers, interns, and aspiring conservation practitioners by sharing her knowledge, experience, and practical skills. Her approachable leadership style encourages teamwork, knowledge-sharing, and continuous professional develop-



ment. As a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field, Philile serves as a powerful role model for young women pursuing careers in conservation. Her ability to lead, mentor, and empower others has strengthened team performance, enhanced operational effectiveness, and contributed significantly to the achievement of conservation goals within Addo Elephant National Park. Colleagues and staff alike value her guidance, commitment, and willingness to support the next generation of conservation professionals. Philile's exceptional leadership, dedication to mentorship, passion for conservation, and commitment to developing others make her a highly deserving candidate for recognition under the Women in Conservation nomination

Karien Desmet: Section Ranger: Kruger National Park

Karien Desmet is a pioneering Section Ranger in the Kruger National Park under South African National Parks (SANParks). She is recognised as the first woman ever appointed as a Section Ranger in SANParks and the youngest person to hold the position. Born and raised in Limpopo province, Desmet developed a deep passion for nature and animals from a very young age. She began her career in the Park in 1999 as a student, gaining practical experience through field guiding. In 2001, at the age of just 21, she was appointed Section Ranger of Vlakteplaas. This landmark appointment made her both the first female Section Ranger in SANParks history and the youngest Section Ranger ever. As a young woman entering a traditionally male-dominated field, she was told she would be "under a magnifying glass," with many watching to



see whether she would succeed. Through determination, passion and energy for the work she loves, she has remained in the role for more than 25 years. Desmet spent five years managing Vlakteplaas section before moving to Mahlangeni section and later taking up her current post at Phalaborwa section. Among her contributions is the establishment of a mounted unit in the Kruger National Park. Horses are used to support anti-poaching efforts.

environments, often working in terrains infiltrated by poachers' day and night. She has also dealt with issues such as illicit cigarette and goat smuggling, some involving armed individuals. Despite these hardships, Sundani remains committed and dedicated to protecting the natural resources and integrity of the park. Her resilience is evident in her ability to operate in challenging