Karoo National Park (KrNP) celebrated 40 years of conservation on Thursday 12 September 2019.

During the late 1950’s a local farmer and birding enthusiast, William Quinton, campaigned for a conservation area in the Beaufort West vicinity. However, it was only in the 1970’s that South African National Parks (SANParks) proposed the establishment of a national park which would be representative of the Nama Karoo Biome. This followed a campaign launched by the South African Nature Foundation, funded through the commission and sale of special art stamps depicting the flora and fauna of the Great Karoo.

Park Manager, Nico van der Walt, says “After considering a number of possible suitable areas, it was decided to establish this new park in the vicinity of Beaufort West. In a gesture of support, the Town Council of Beaufort West made a valuable donation of 7 209 hectares of communal land north-west of the town to SANParks. This area then formed the nucleus of the Karoo National Park, proclaimed in 1979.”

It has since grown considerably and now stands at 90 535 hectares. KrNP has been the scene of many epic events over the years – the first 4x4 trail within SANParks was opened in May 1992, namely the Pienaar’s Pass 4x4 Trail and the world’s first Fossil Trail incorporating braille was established in 1994.

As it is SANParks policy to reintroduce wildlife species which would have occurred in an area before hunting or habitat loss forced them to local extinction in earlier centuries, a number of re-introductions have taken place in Karoo over the years, most notably black rhino in December 1993, lions in November 2010 and brown hyena in 2012.

The Park has, over the years, also increased in popularity as a tourist destination. “The rest camp was opened in March 1989 and has been expanded upon over the last thirty years. The entire Park currently boasts with 138 beds made up of chalets, family cottages, cottages, camp sites as well as the more rustic, exclusive offerings of the Afsaal and Embizweni Cottages inside the game viewing area and the Grantham Environmental Education Centre for groups,” says van der Walt.

Other attractions include self-drive game viewing and numerous 4x4 trails, the Bulkaal picnic site with swimming pool, Doornhoek picnic site, guided night and morning drives, Ou Schuur Interpretive Centre, walking trails in the form of the Fossil, Bossie and Rest camp trail and Sylvester single track mountain bike or jogging trail.

A total of 46 full-time staff are employed in the Park, as well as seven temporary staff and a further 94 people through its Biodiversity Social Projects. Since the commencement of the project in 2010, teams have rehabilitated 11 665 ha in the Park.

Van der Walt says “I am proud to lead such a great team. Thanks to their hard work and dedication, the Park is a firm favourite with guests for its warm Karoo hospitality. Proof of this is the many regional and national awards we have won over the years – the most recent being that of Best Performing Gate and Reception at this year’s Regional Achievement Awards.”

“We are always working at improving the visitor experience and by introducing more activities into the Park over the years, we have been able to change the Park’s reputation as simply being an overnight option on the road between the coast and the interior, to a holiday destination in its own right,” concluded van der Walt.
Compliments

Addo Elephant
- We recently stayed at the Spekboom Tented Camp. There was a young man looking after the camp by the name of Thembankosi Thomson. He was really good at keeping the camp neat and tidy. He was on top of his game. He was kind and attentive. We had family from Germany and they were very impressed. He really was exceptional. The staff at Main Camp were also attentive and it was a real pleasure to visit Addo. It was our first visit and definitely not the last visit. Thank you for a wonderful experience.

Karoo
- Thank you for a lovely stay at Karoo National Park. The family cottages are beautiful. We enjoyed the breakfast that was included in the accommodation.
- Ek wil net vir SANParke, die personeel en bestuur van die Karoo NP, die Ereveldwagters en Japie Claassen persoonlik gelukwens met die Karoo NP se 40ste verjaarsdag. Baie dankie almal van julle wat so baie doen om die Park op te rig, uit te bou, instand te hou en versorg. Julle doen uitmuntende werk, doen so voort. Sterkte en voorspoed vorentoe.
- Mr. Nico van der Walt is a very competent manager. This is the best SANParks resort that I have visited in all the years. There is not one leaking tap or broken tile in the bathrooms. EXCELLENT! Congratulations to Mr. van der Walt and his team!!!! You are an example to other resort managers.

Mountain Zebra
- Thank you for a lovely stay at Mountain Zebra National Park. The swimming pool area is beautiful and well maintained, well done. Thank you for the upgrade of the Park and cottages.

Upcoming events in Mountain Zebra National Park

Date: 1st to 3rd November 2019
Venue: Conference Centre, Mountain Zebra National Park
Price: R650 per person (excl. VAT)
Includes course material, lunch, supper and teas
Course Content: Intro to digital cameras, lighting, manual and auto settings, focus, landscape and nature photography

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Mountain Zebra Honorary Rangers keeping busy
The SANParks Honorary Rangers Mountain Zebra Region hosted a fundraising golf day on Saturday 7 September, at the Middelburg Golf Club. The better ball American scramble was won by Christopher Lombard and Niel Schoeman with 49 points. In second place were Shaun Vermeulen and Donnie McCallum, with Thys van Rooyen and Christo Reeners in third place.

The funds generated by the golf day will go towards conservation projects in Mountain Zebra National Park outside Cradock. The SANParks Honorary Rangers Mountain Zebra Region’s contribution to SANParks is manifested in many ways, such as raising valuable funds, creating vital public awareness and supplying much needed manpower and equipment to supplement various conservation, tourism and environmental education needs within the Park.

West Rand Honorary Rangers make a difference in the Karoo
Many thanks to the West Rand Honorary Rangers for their contribution of three lion collars and Willie Engelbrecht, member of the Honorary Rangers’ National Executive, for two K9 beds. Seen here at the handover of the items are Karoo Honorary Ranger Christo van Zyl and the Park’s Senior Section Ranger, Riaan Nel.
The number of people who visited the five South African National Parks (SANParks) at no cost in the Frontier Region (Addo Elephant, Camdeboo, Garden Route, Karoo and Mountain Zebra National Parks) during SA National Parks week increased by 56% compared to the same period last year.

The 14th annual SA National Parks Week was celebrated from 8 to 15 September – having been extended by three days over two weekends. This campaign under the established theme ‘Know Your National Parks’ allows locals with valid identity documents an opportunity to spend a day at a national park of their choice free of charge. SANParks CEO, Fundisile Mketeni, says the objective of the week is to give all South Africans a chance to enjoy and experience the beauty and majesty of the national parks.

Nationally, 113 032 visitors enjoyed free access to various parks. “We had an increase of just over 52% this year from last year’s 74 086 visitors. SA National Parks Week aims to create a culture of pride in all South Africans in their relationship with the country’s natural, cultural and historical heritage. When people start to take pride in the national parks, then we believe that they will start to understand the importance of conservation,” he says.

Regionally, 30 657 people made use of the opportunity compared to 19 610 last year. Just about half of these visited Addo Elephant National Park outside Port Elizabeth – 15 091, an increase of just over 52% on last year’s 9 626. Garden Route National Park saw the biggest increase in visitors – a 96% growth from 5 926 to 11 589 this year.

The feature element of this campaign is the free access granted to all South African day visitors carrying their official Identity Documents. Since its inception in 2006, National Parks Week has seen an influx of 551 393 day visitors in all participating parks. “These numbers are encouraging and tell us that more people are taking advantage of this free week at our National Parks,” said Mketeni.

The annual SA National Parks Week has been made possible with support from First National Bank (FNB) and Total South Africa. “Without our sponsors this week would not have materialised and South Africans would not be able to visit our parks free of charge”. SANParks thanks all South Africans who took part in this week, especially educators and school groups. “The survival of the South African national parks system and our natural and cultural heritage lies in the people of South Africa,” concluded Mketeni.

**SA National Parks Week entries more than double**

Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) outside Port Elizabeth has a new inhabitant, and one, if spotted, will be immediately recognisable - with a shoulder height of 3.18m and tusks measuring an impressive 1.39m from the lip out. His weight is estimated at about six tonnes.

The 35-year-old “Tembe”, introduced into the Park at the beginning of September, is the first of three bulls which will be brought in as a donation from Tembe Elephant Park in KwaZulu-Natal. Addo Park Manager, Nick de Goede, says: “Addo’s elephant numbers are currently in excess of 600 animals and it is vital that we continue to supplement the population genetically. The Park’s population is seen as a key elephant population within conservation circles nationally and internationally as it is one of the most well-researched and understood African elephant populations in the world.”

“It is for this reason that SANParks requested large bulls from Tembe Elephant Park about a year ago to supplement our elephant population. The Tembe elephants are known for the size of their tusks and are genetically diverse from the Addo elephants, making them ideal for improving the genetic diversity within our elephant population,” continues de Goede.

He says the actual operation of moving the elephant was no mean feat. The process, headed up by SANParks’ Veterinary Wildlife Services, involved two drivers, one veterinarian, two veterinarian technicians and many other pairs of hands and took in excess of 36 hours to complete.

De Goede says he saw Tembe out in the Park and he appears to be adapting well, having met up and walking with two other bulls. He says they hope to get the other two bulls into Addo before the end of the year.

**New tusker in Addo Elephant National Park**

Tembe Elephant Park is owned by the Tembe tribe and managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. The chairperson of the Tembe Co-management Board, Vusi Sithole, was present during the capture and officially handed the bull over to de Goede.

“On behalf of SANParks, we would like to thank Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the Tembe community for the kind donation of the bull. We would also like to thank Tembe Elephant Lodge for hosting the capture teams from SANParks and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Network for Animals was also instrumental in making the operation a success by donating two satellite tracking colours and covering the expense of the helicopter for the duration of the capture,” said de Goede.

AENP was proclaimed in 1931 with only eleven elephants, of which only seven were known to be breeding animals. Through the eighties and nineties, various research was undertaken on these animals and it was proven that the population had experienced a serious bottleneck, which led to a loss in genetic variation. Due to the concerns about the genetic degradation of the population, a decision was made in the early 2000’s to supplement the population with eight bulls from Kruger National Park. Unfortunately most of these bulls have since died and currently only two are still known to be within the population.
Addo youth develops skills

In August, 22 candidates from Addo’s neighbouring, Nomathamsanga village had the opportunity to participate in the Siyanzela Youth Development Programme by the Wilderness Foundation. The Siyanzela Programme focused on personal growth, developing professional characteristics and also physical and environmental wellness. Students had hands-on training of nature conservation and were screened for the Ulovanne field guide training programme (FGASA Training). The graduation ceremony took place at the Park on 22 August where three students were selected to proceed with FGASA Training and will register for 2020. Congratulations to all!

Welcome

We welcome Ayanda Nomasonto Nhleko. She started as a Receptionist at Mountain Zebra National Park on 1 September. We wish her all of the best!

Farewell

Farewell to our Business Development Manager, Andile Bhanqo Namntu. We wish you all the best in your new venture. We know you'll fly the SANParks flag wherever you go!

Skills development in Mountain Zebra National Park

Staff at Mountain Zebra National Park says they have been noticing the CV's received for job applications have not quite up to standard, so they took matters into their own hands.

The Park’s People and Conservation and Human Capital Departments took it upon themselves to educate the community in Cradock on CV writing and interviewing tips during August. The sessions were well attended by the community where they gained valuable practical experience.