The two canine members of Addo Elephant National Park’s (AENP) ranger corps are now equally protected from life-threatening situations, like their human counterparts, thanks to the donation of bullet proof vests from integrated risk solutions company, Quemic. In addition to this, the company also donated two trauma/first aid kits specifically for the dogs, as well as dog food for an entire year.

Quemic’s Regional Ranger in the Western Cape, Nikki Haynes, was born in Addo when his father, Mike Haynes, was the Hospitality Services Manager in the Park. Mike heard about Addo’s need for the items at a demonstration with the dogs about three months ago and thought it was an ideal opportunity for Nikki to get involved, as the company he works for, Quemic, already provides firearm training to SANParks’ Environmental Monitors. The company is also involved in anti-rhino poaching operations with private landowners and other nature conservation agencies.

Quemic’s Director, Gerrit Lamprecht and Nikki were on hand to personally hand the safety equipment and food over to the dogs and their handlers in the Park. The vests, trauma/first aid kits and food is valued at over R130 000.

Addo’s two canine rangers, Banshee and Bullet, are about five years old and provide sniffing and tracking support to the rangers. Bullet, provided to AENP by the Endangered Wildlife Trust, and Banshee will now be kitted out in their bullet proof vests while on duty, protected from gunshot wounds and knife attacks. Their handlers will be given training on how to use the dogs’ trauma/first aid kits, which are advanced enough to sustain them until they reach a veterinarian.

AENP Conservation Manager, John Adendorff, says “We cannot tell you how grateful we are for your handover today. We want to give our dogs everything we can to ensure their safety, as we do with our rangers. They are integral to our operations and today’s sponsorship ensures that they have the best protection when they’re in the field.”
Compliments received

Addo Elephant National Park
- Our family of four did a morning horse ride in Addo. It was so good. We loved your guides. So friendly, informative and knowledgeable. Highly recommending the horse ride to everyone.
- We met one of your game drivers and I found him. He was so friendly and outgoing. Made us wish we were going on a drive with him. Overall your staff members were good to everyone.
- Your Addo guide was excellent.
- I grew up in Port Elizabeth and visited Addo many years ago. I have lived in Canada for the past 17 years. We had a wonderful experience staying off Addo to our kids. Keep up the good work!

Camdeboo National Park
- I would like to congratulate the staff. They were very friendly with everything as clean and neat as possible.
- Really a gem of a Park. I will definitely stay there again!
- Well maintained and clean.

Garden Route National Park
- The camping docks are an excellent alternative to normal tents or hotels. We had everything we needed and it was fantastic to be a part of the forest. Hope to see this initiative replicated in other Parks (Knysna)
- Absolutely amazing facilities in the tree top chalets Park very exclusive having the place to ourselves. Wish I could have stayed there for more than one night (Knysna)
- I was assisted by a trainee and she handled Reception well. I booked additional nights and she was assisted by the senior person to make sure everything went smoothly (Storms River Mouth)
- Excellent reception office with very friendly staff. Well done, thank you (Eb&Flow)
- We stay frequently at Ebb & Flow south camp, often in the Forest Cabins. We love the Park and the personnel there.

Karoo National Park
- We congratulate you on what we experienced as the best managed national park. In particular we were impressed with the professional reception staff who were very helpful and made sure everything went smoothly.

Mountain Zebra National Park
- We had been in October last year when it was so dry. This time we couldn't believe how much grass and water there was. It was fantastic.
- The guesthouses were clean and comfortable, and we enjoyed our stay. The price was well worth it.

Message from Dries Engelsbrecht, Regional General Manager

In a time when it feels as if there’s so much negativity in the world, isn’t it great to read this a “run of Addo”, literally born in the Park, returns years later to sponsor its canine rangers with life-saving equipment in the form of bullet proof vests and trauma kits, and adding a year’s supply of food on for them in the form of bullet proof vests and trauma kits, and adding a year’s supply of food on for the rest of the year.

Water – while it is given freely, can take life too. Some guests at Addo have been exasperating about what they term the lack of water provision in the Park. We’ve put together what we hope will provide clarity on the matter on page 3. And on this page, you’ll read about what turned out to be a heartwarming story about a little elephant who was nearly drowned at Hapoor Dam. This story was written by one of Addo’s conservation students, Dolene de Villiers, while another student, James Dickier, did the write-up on page 4 about Rhino Art’s visit to a local school near Darlington Dam. We did all these youngsters for taking the time to give us all this insight into their lives.

Garden Route National Park has also been a hive of activity lately – hosting the second annual Walking Festival in April, Brant scrap in Knysna also finally went through a planned ecological burn of approximately 71,000 hectares, which had been postponed since last year. Many thanks to all who made this a successful operation. Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA), Knysna Municipal Fire Services, Working for Wildlife (WWF) & Susan Campbell and others.

Compliment of the month: Karoo National Park
My wife and I have overnighted at Karoo National Park a number of times, but this time for three nights in April on our way to the Cape on our way back.

When we pitched on the 27th, we were given a rousing welcome by Patricia and Gertrudis. Both had been very good to us, but then all of your staff are really nice people. Once we had settled in, I went in search of a size 10 nut that had fallen off and cause the tailpipe of my old Land Rover to backfire. That was not only embarrassing as your workshop doors were closed as they should be on a public holiday. Returning to our spot, I flagged down an oncoming bakkie, it was Mondi. He told me to relax and return 20 minutes later with three nuts. It was no problem for him to refit it. His attitude and willingness to be helpful was just great.

We thoroughly enjoyed our stay. Please be so good as to pass our appreciation on to the staff named above.

Rob Lloyd

In the last edition we brought you news that the Garden Route had been voted by National Geographic in its list of 12 Global Destinations, encouraging Northern Hemispherians to visit the area.

Earlier this month, one of the USA’s biggest news agencies, CNN, recommended South Africa as a place to visit on holiday with Camdeboo National Park’s Valley of Desolation featuring on its list of “23 reasons to visit SA”. This while it issues European travel alerts, cautioning its citizens to be wary of terror attacks at tourist destinations on the continent.

The CNN list notes neighbours to natural wonders in their highlights, which for us also is a reminder of just how magical our country is, and hopefully motivates you to explore South Africa too.

Elephant rescue at Hapoor Dam

What do the Addo Elephant National Park rangers do when they get wind of an elephant calf stuck in one of its dams? They go out and save it, of course.

Exactly what happened on the evening of Sunday 6 April when they heard of a calf in trouble - not small and not on its own.

After wisely choosing from Main Camp, the rangers made their way to Hapoor, where they found two Honorary Rangers who pointed out the calf to them as well as the mother refusing to try to help her baby.

Backup was called and a further two Honorary Rangers arrived to assist as well. One of the rangers used a vehicle to drive the mother away from the scene and keep an eye on her, while another pulled up to the calf with two rangers on board who would lift the calf out of the water.

But he/she wasn’t safely on terra firma just yet. When the rangers noticed, they doused the calf with water, and assisted with jumping into Hapoor on both occasions to help the little tyke out.

Honorary Rangers! Sandile, though, seemed to be the man of the hour, as everyone cheered and praised him for courageously jumping into Hapoor on both occasions to help the little one take

Garden Route Walking Festival a hit

The second Garden Route Walking Festival attracted some 9 000 people to walk the combination of walking and hiking trails offered by various landowners in the Garden Route. The one and only walking festival of its kind in South Africa was held between 14 and 17 April, with all the tickets sold out.

Festival organiser, Galeo Saintz, said there was a hike for everyone on the festival’s menu. “There were strenuous, long ones which took long hours, then also moderate and relatively shorter ones,” said Galeo.

What makes the festival so unique is the buy-in received from various landowners in the Garden Route. The one and only walking festival of its kind in South Africa was held between 14 and 17 April, with all the tickets sold out.

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If AENP is to be sustainable into the future, we have to try and mimic nature as closely as possible. Clarity around the provision of water in Addo Elephant National Park

South African National Parks are managed as natural systems in which conservationists try as best as possible to mimic natural processes. Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) is managed with a natural gradient of water in place. Nowhere in a natural system would one find water holes dispersed evenly across the landscape. Nature has a way of avoiding this at all costs to prevent the homogenous use of vegetation which ultimately will lead to the extinction or degrading of species. This is the case currently and we need to manage all species, not only elephant. Conservationists need to mimic this or else our elephants will keep a growth rate up of between seven and nine percent per annum. This is not a sustainable model and the very elephants we are trying to protect will become the biggest threat to our precious national park.

For this reason the Park has a water gradient in place that has been around for a couple of years now. AENP’s unnatural river is represented by Hapoor, Spelboom, Ghwari, Woodlands, Nysthi and Domkrug, where large amounts of water is provided. The remaining water holes in the Park are not in place to quench elephant water needs, but rather to meet the needs of other species.

This is to ensure that elephants don’t out-compete other species, especially the rare and threatened species. This is the case currently and we need to manage all species, not only elephant.

With this in mind, we will erect these exclusions around Lismore and Peasland in the near future, hoping that the general, loyal visitor will understand. The structure is rectangular in shape, with four telephone posts in the corners. An electric strand is suspended at two metres in height and horizontal one metre strands hanging off the main strand at 800mm intervals. These strands are electrified to stop elephants from walking in, who will soon realise that water point is not available to them and proceed to areas with water that is able to sustain them. Other game is then able to use those water points without having to compete with elephants.

Some may think this is cruel, but the alternative requires the reduction in elephant densities. This buys us time and protects the Park from catastrophic homogenisation of the landscape. AENP hopes to extend the elephant home range in the near future. We are currently completing a fence in the Darlington section which will see the introduction of elephants from the main game viewing area into a 50 000 hectare area around the Darlington dam. Furthermore, we are shortly going to request funds to fence off another 29 000 hectares of land in the Kabouga section which will allow us to move another large number of elephants across to this area.

Lastly, we are currently making use of contraceptive drugs to halt the growth in elephant numbers in the Nyathi and Kuzuko contractual areas of the Park. This is an expensive method but works very effectively.
Planned burns - a huge win for conservation

The planned ecological burn in Brenton (Knysna), which was postponed last year, got underway on 15 May. The steering committee concerned about the ecological wellbeing of the area made a decision guided by the weather to burn on the day. Approximately 71 hectares on the Southern slopes along the Brenton-on-sea Road was set to burn which included Portions 39 and 40 of the Uitzigt Farm.

“It is a collective effort from all stakeholders because 85% of the fynbos scheduled to burn has not burned in the last 30 years,” said Dirk Smit of the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (FPA).

The burn captured on film.

Maretha Alant, Environmental Planner of the Garden Route National Park adds, “Many fynbos species only recruit after a fire as fire stimulates seed release and germination. In a landscape where fire is kept indefinitely, fynbos often reverts to thicker vegetation or forest. Without fire, fynbos will lose its true character and species.” In addition, Fynbos fires should occur at intervals of 10 to 30 years. Natural fires typically occur during warm and dry weather conditions, which result in high intensity fires, which is desirable from an ecological point of view.

Fire close to an urban area is risky business. However, there are trade-offs that have to happen to preserve a system that has not had fire for too long.

Controlled burns such as this planned one will help minimise the risk of uncontrolled, accidental wildfires. The lower fuel load after the burn is said to result in lower fire risk for a few years.

The remaining natural fynbos Sand Fynbos is approximately 1.478 ha (9.6% of the original extent) and falls short of the conservation target of 3,331 hectares.

Rhino Art at Middelwater Primary School

Rhino Art is a non-profit organisation (NPO) with the goal of educating and involving children in the fight against rhino poaching in South Africa, created by the Kingsley Holgate foundation. They focus on the next generation of conservationists by visiting schools and teaching its learners about conserving critically endangered animals in a way that they understand and can relate to - with a dash of fun added into the equation. Their focus is set on rural schools far from cities and towns, as these children don’t receive much exposure to education from a conservation point of view. Many corporates are involved in the Rhino Art project as supporters towards the cause in the war against poaching.

Rhino Art member and SANParks Honorary Ranger, Dave Pattle, and a film crew made their mark on the hearts and minds of 40 children in the rural primary school of Middelwater, near Addo Elephant National Park’s Darlington section, during April. The school consists of two classrooms and an informal hostel. Grades 1 and 2 are taught together in one of the classrooms while the Grade 3 and 4 learners occupy the other. The principal is one of two teachers at the school, while a hostel mother cares for the children’s every need from Mondays to Thursdays.

Dave’s initial visit to the school was on Wednesday 19 April, when he delivered colouring pictures and crayons to the school and told the children that they should do their best to make them beautiful. He promised them that the best artists would win a prize when he returned. Two days later, the kids were waiting for his return, masterpieces in hand.

The teachers, Dave, his film crew, a Kuzuko Lodge staff member, and a Student Ranger and Environmental Monitor from Addo were given the task of choosing the best works of art. However, before Dave announced the winners, he gave the learners a short educational session where he spoke about what is happening to rhino populations, why it is happening, who is creating the problem and what can be done about it.

When that was over he called out the winners of the competition, handed over their certificates and promised them that the best artists would win a prize when he returned. Two days later, the kids were waiting for his return, masterpieces in hand.

The three caused great excitement among guests, who had never before 2014 seen cheetah in Addo’s game viewing area. They had been the topic of many discussions since, with some groups planning visits to the Park with the specific hope of catching them on film. Today’s operation was conducted by AENP conservation officials, with assistance from the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). The animals will now form part of the EWT’s Cheetah Metapopulation Project (CMP), which entails the management of over 300 cheetahs on more than 50 small fenced reserves in South Africa.

A managed population is a set of geographically isolated populations of the same species that exchange individuals through human-controlled movement. Fenced metapopulations need to be managed to prevent the unintended effects of inbreeding. The project is a collaborative effort between all cheetah reserves in South Africa, co-ordinated by the EWT and funded by a number of international environmental entities and generous donations. In other words, the principal goal of the CMP is to maintain the genetic and demographic integrity of the metapopulation and to increase the resident range of cheetah in South Africa.

AENP Conservation Manager John Adendorff, says they foresee the two will form a coalition at Phinda and hopefully pass on their genetics to new generations.
Congratulations to Hesron Ruiters from the Tsitsikamma section of Garden Route National Park on the birth of his twins last month! Can anyone say “double trouble”?

We also wish to congratulate Kyle Smith (Garden Route - Scientific Services) and his wife Matty on the birth of their son, Kane, on 7 April. We wish you all the best with your new extended families, colleagues!

Volkswagen Group South Africa had motoring journalists from across the country experience the road up to the Valley of Desolation in their new generation Golfs at the beginning of May. Needless to say, they weren’t disappointed when they got to the top to enjoy the view over some drinks and snacks, and apparently the car doesn’t drive too badly either!

Ayeza Vabaza, previously based in Tsitsikamma, started in her new position as Receptionist at Mountain Zebra National Park at the beginning of May. Meanwhile, hard work paid off for Sinethemba Tiem, who used to be a Field Guide (intern) in the Park. He has now been appointed as Field Guide on a permanent basis.

Congratulations and welcome to you both!

New appointments in Mountain Zebra

Ayeza Vabaza
Sinethemba Tiem

Well done Karoo National Park!