Addo Elephant National Park
Visit the third largest national park, with its closest gate to Port Elizabeth only 30 minutes away (Marysholweni near Colchester) for free between Monday and Friday next week! Enjoy self-drive game viewing and birding throughout the Park, pack a picnic basket or braai at Jack’s picnic site inside the game viewing area or at Main Camp and enjoy all the other amenities on offer there – underground bird hide, viewing decks, interpretive centre and much more.

Camdeboo
Potential visitors in or around Graaff-Reinet are spoilt for choice, as the Park will also open up its gates at no cost for the entire weekend after SA National Parks Week. So, for those who can’t make it during the week, Saturday and Sunday 23 and 24 September will still be open as free entry.

Garden Route
A Spring Forest Walk (Diepwalle) will kickstart the week on the morning of Sunday 16 September from 9AM. There is a choice of guided walks on either the Terblans trail or the Elephant trail. There are also planned daily excursions by the People & Conservation Officers in each section of the Park - guided mine tours during the week (Goudveld), guided forest and fynbos excursions (Knysna), guided hikes and others. On Saturday 23 September: The popular Sunset Serenade (sunset musical in the Ebb & Flow Rest Camp in Wilderness) is planned to take place directly after a 4X4 excursion with Honorary Rangers (page 3). Meanwhile, Tsitsikamma will come alive with sporting activities and a traditional dance competition at the Storms River Village Sports Fields.

Karoo
The first 100 visitors to the gates at Karoo National Park on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September will also still get to enjoy the benefits of free access, so the trick will be to get there early. Once inside, guests will be able to make full use of the facilities such as the picnic sites, game viewing roads, 4x4 trails, interpretive centre, fossil trail and everything else the Park has to offer.

Mountain Zebra
Similar to Karoo, the proverbial early bird will catch the worm at Mountain Zebra – with free entry being extended to the first 100 visitors on both the Saturday and Sunday after SA National Parks Week. The Park’s People & Conservation Department will be hosting daily programmes for both booked groups and Park visitors from Monday to Friday, so be sure to enquire at Reception.

South Africans have an open invitation to explore any of the five national parks in the Frontier Region of South African National Parks between 18 and 22 September during SA National Parks Week 2017.
Compliment of the month

Garden Route National Park

We recently spent five nights at Ebb and Flow North Camp as part of the Game Rangers Association contingent.

From gate staff to camp staff, they were friendly and helpful. On Wednesday 26 July, interaction with camp staff gave new life to the word ‘efficiency’. There had been a bit of a mix-up with our accommodation on our first night and we wished to move to another rondavel. Unfortunately my husband, who was attending a meeting some distance from us, was unable to help with this. However, the staff at Ebb and Flow were most willing to help. They promptly arranged – promptly, efficiently and pleasantly – with two different team members them to carry our abundant luggage to the new rondavel. Everything happened as you would expect in a good camp.

You kindly allowed me to look at other rondavels and then made arrangements for one recently vacated to be cleaned, the staff to let me know when it was ready and then for me to carry our abundant luggage to the new rondavel. Everything happened as you had arranged – promptly, efficiently and pleasantly – with two different team members, coming to inform me of the arrangements. I was almost overcome, as I am unused to such efficient, willing and professional behaviour. There was simply no problem.

Please convey to the staff how much they were appreciated and how very important a friendly and willing manner, coupled with efficiency, is.

Ebb & Flow appears to be a very well-run and well-kept camp which is a credit to SANParks.

Refined by the fire

It is as if Eleanor Roosevelt was speaking about most women in the Garden Route when she said “A woman is like a teabag; you can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water”. The story of two women in the Garden Route National Park in pursuit of organisational objectives post-tragedies inspire such awe.

Maretha Alant, the Park’s Environmental Planner, has the challenging task of ensuring landowners, including municipalities, farmers and others, comply with environmental regulations. She works with areas neighbouring the Park (buffer zones). One of her day-to-day responsibilities is to comment on regulations such as Environmental Impact Assessments and other actions in favour of sustainable corridors for nature.

She received a Regional Award for Innovation two years ago for working diligently at finding creative means of improving the organisation’s productivity. She had come up with more than the usual number of creative ways to get landowners to buy into the protection of the buffer zones. In 2015 she also planned an interesting excursion that would assist both farmers and researchers in the area to determine the course of the Knysna River.

When Maretha lost her homes and belongings in the Knysna fires recently, she took a few days to get to terms with her loss but was soon back at work chasing deadlines. The very next week, she had a seminar to attend to discuss the latest environmental laws affecting Protected Areas.

Maretha’s story and that of her other colleagues who also lost everything during the Knysna fires is that of perseverance against all odds.

Then there is Bulelw Miengi, who manages the Titzikamma section of the Garden Route National Park and who had worked in that role for exactly six months when two significant incidents threatened the section’s income and capacity. Not only did she manage the risky incidents well, she also executed plans to protect the Park from disruptions to operations and tourism revenue.

When the Cattle Baron restaurant and the Park Shop burnt down in November last year, Bulelw was on site to manage the incident and led her staff and those of the two concessions through the incident. She detailed a turnaround plan for the Park which included liaising with various support divisions. She was instrumental in leading her team through this amidst the absence of her management team who were mostly on leave to prepare to work throughout the festive season.

The following month, the Minister of Environmental Affairs made a decision to rezone part of the Titzikamma Marine Protected Area to accommodate line fishing in 20% of the area, making up three zones. Bulelw met with various stakeholders including communities, Department of Environmental Affairs staff and scientists to ensure all was in place, and guided her staff through the period.

Women’s Day in Mountain Zebra

“Be bold for change” was the theme of this year’s Women’s Day celebrations in Mountain Zebra National Park. Park Manager, Megan Taplin, explained to the Park’s fairer sex, including those from Biodiversity Social Projects, that the theme calls on women to help forge a better, more gender-inclusive working world and expanded on the topic. The guest speaker was cradock psychologist, Dr Edelweiss Bester.
Over 1 200 learners benefited from a three-day career expo along the Garden Route at the beginning of August.

National Science Week is an annual event, and the theme this year was “Advancing science tourism”, in conjunction with the United Nations’ International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

Staff from Garden Route National Park’s Knysna section joined a host of other organisations on a joint roadshow between 2 and 4 August: Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Cape Nature, Boston College, Nelson Mandela University, Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform, South Cape TVET College, NSFAS, George Municipality and George Youth Centre. Over this period representatives visited high school learners between Grades 9 and 12 in the Knysna and George areas.

The aim was to provide career guidance to these youngsters and advise them on which subjects to take in order for them to be able to kick off their chosen qualifications.

An exclusive 4x4 “Forest Experience” route through the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park awaits adventure lovers during National Heritage weekend in September, with three routes to choose from.

SANParks Honorary Rangers Wilderness Region and SANParks staff have organised the 4x4 trail excursions which will, for the first time, provide access to certain areas in the national park not normally open to the public. The routes feature indigenous forests, fynbos and stunning mountain vistas and takes place on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September.

Access to the 4x4 Exhibition - to be held at the Wilderness Common, the starting area of the 4x4 excursion - is open to the public. Participation in the routes is strictly controlled and each route excursion is restricted in the number of vehicles which can participate. A trained Honorary Ranger guide will accompany the vehicles during the excursion.

The three routes, one crossing the Voortrekker Pass, one going up to Windmeulnek and a third accessing the Goldfields region of the Park, are graded between one and three. They will all depart from the Wilderness Common at staged intervals, which will also be the venue for a 4x4 Exhibition where leading manufacturers of 4x4 goods will exhibit their wares.

For more information on the routes, or if you wish to rent an exhibition stand, please email Derek Oldfield at oldfield@mighty.co.za or Barbara Little at barbs.little@gmail.com respectively.

The plan by SANParks Honorary Rangers is to organise the 4x4 Forest Experience as an annual fundraising event and an opportunity to showcase the magnificent natural features of the Garden Route National Park.

Tsitsikamma open to visitors after the storm

On Thursday 24 August Tsitsikamma’s Storms River Rest Camp’s temporary restaurant was partly affected by strong sea swells as a result of a Spring high tide. Sea swells reached a height of nine metres. However, after realigning the tent according to safety standards and once satisfied with the setup, engineers issued a safety certificate to proceed operating.

The sea damaged the stretch tent linked to the main tent of the restaurant, which will be sent for fixing. The barricade on top of the retaining wall of the Otter trail hiking camp site was also washed away.

The restaurant is currently set up and operating outside the main marquee. The old restaurant site is cordoned off and plans to rebuild a new restaurant are underway.

All other activities in the Park are open including the famous Otter hiking trail. The Park’s shop is also open from early morning until late.

Tsitsikamma open to visitors after the storm

National Science Week

Schools visited were Percy Mdala High school in Khayalethu, Knysna; Concordia High in White location, Knysna and Thembalethu High in Thembalethu Township, George.

Four main issues were highlighted:

- They urged the learners to study hard and to not to be afraid to take Life sciences and Mathematics as subjects at school – but rather to have a positive attitude towards them.
- They raised awareness on the role science and technology plays in day-to-day life. The learners were encouraged to be part of the innovation needed to achieve sustainability in resource utilisation and to find eco-friendly ways to remedy the environmental challenges we are currently facing.
- They emphasised that applications to tertiary institutions for admission and funding/bursaries should be done timeously so as to avoid taking unplanned gap years.
- They were told to be aware of the job, volunteer and study opportunities offered by the different organisations represented, as young minds with innovative ideas are in high demand to take those organisations to new heights.

Plans are afoot to create an even bigger expo next year, which parents and the general public will also have access to.
Each year, as a precursor to the annual national SANParks Kudu Awards, staff members from each of the regions within the organisation nominate who they think are deserving of special recognition at their Regional Awards ceremonies. A voting panel goes through all of the nominations and decide on who they think should receive special praise for their hard work during the previous financial year. Then, at what must be one of the highlights of the year for our staff members, certificates and trophies are awarded to the top achievers at the prestigious Frontier Regional Awards evening. This year, the event took place in Wilderness on 17 August.

These awards are spread over a number of different categories awarded by Regional General Manager, Dries Engelbrecht:
Regional Awards

Top Regional Achievers – 2016/17

Regional Manager’s Award
Melanie De Morney
Garden Route National Park
In recognition of passionately engaging the youth in conservation research and monitoring.

Regional Manager’s Award
Grant Grootboom
Garden Route National Park
In total command of the front office and reservation systems and has a great understanding of the tourism income and expenditure budget.

Regional Manager’s Award
Isaac Hendriks
Garden Route National Park
He carries out his job with pride and enthusiasm and has become a great asset to the welcoming experience of Wilderness.

Regional Manager’s Award
Pearl Joseph
Garden Route National Park
Pearl is a dedicated employee, always prepared to provide much-needed guidance and support in her department.

Regional Manager’s Award
Hilton Wildeman
Garden Route National Park
Hilton’s dedication towards his job, his willingness to always assist colleagues, his friendliness and humbleness is exemplary.

Best Performing Reception of the Year
Karoo National Park
This team’s problem-solving skills are exceptional, they are able to work independently and in a responsible manner at all times.

Best Performing Camp of the Year
Mountain Zebra National Park
Excellent financial results, customer service, friendliness and efficiency of staff, cleanliness of accommodation, the standard of guided activities offered, etc.

Best Performing Park of the Year
Karoo National Park
Excellent working relationships with stakeholders, outstanding customer service, neat facilities, good financial results.

Best Performing Ranger Post of the Year
Environment Monitors and James Maarman
Camdeboo National Park
Since their appointment, they have practically eradicated any incidents of illegal activities both within the Park’s borders and on neighbouring properties.

Regional Manager’s Award
Welgedacht Ranger Post
Mountain Zebra National Park
They have become vital to the Park’s management and protection of the black rhino population and should be recognised for their skill, dedication and vital contribution to conservation.