

# NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

## Eastern Cape, South Africa

### November/December 2008



#### **About this newsletter**

*This is a general newsletter – sent out on a bimonthly basis - about the latest happenings and developments in the Addo Elephant National Park. Please see contact details at the end for further enquiries*

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#### **ADDO'S MARINE TEAM NAB ILLEGAL DIVERS**

Marine rangers from the Addo Elephant National Park apprehended four suspects on the night of Thursday, 4 December and a further two suspects the next morning for diving illegally in the Bird Island Marine Protected Area. The suspects also face charges of trespassing on Bird Island.



Illegal divers brought in on the Park's vessel: Kadouw

Although no abalone was found with the divers, seven diving cylinders were confiscated in the operation. The six suspects were taken to the Port Alfred Police Station to be charged.

The SANParks marine rangers received assistance from Marine & Coastal Management, the South African Police Service and the Traffic Department in the operation.

Bird Island in Algoa Bay is part of the Addo Elephant National Park and home to the largest breeding population of Cape gannets in the world

At approximately 10.30 pm on that Thursday night, the Park's marine rangers found two boats with divers active in the Bird Island Marine Protected Area. The rangers gave chase with the Park's high-speed boat but the two boats fled, abandoning their divers in the water.

Park rangers later found four divers who had surfaced on Bird Island and arrested them. The search continued through the night for the remaining divers and a further two suspects were arrested the following morning.



Confiscated diving equipment including diving cylinders

as well as an African penguin colony.

## ADDO'S BLACK RHINO FIND NEW HOME IN KAROO NATIONAL PARK



Measurements are taken from a tranquilised rhino before translocation

On 23 October, three black rhino arrived at their new home in Karoo National Park near Beaufort West after translocation from Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape.

“This represents a full circle for these young rhino cows,” said SANParks veterinarian, Dr. David Zimmerman. “Thandi, one of the cows we translocated, was born in Addo Elephant National Park, then hand-raised when her mother rejected her. Today we are finally able to move her back to the wild.”

The three black rhino cows, aged between five and a half and three years, had been resident in a 400-hectare camp in the Addo Elephant National Park. The rhino Thandi was born in 2003 in the bomas in Addo Elephant National Park following her mother’s translocation to the Park from Namibia as part of a bid to bring new genes into the Addo rhino population.

Due to stress in the bomas, Thandi was rejected by her mother and could not suckle. At two days old she was flown to a rehabilitation centre in Pretoria where she was raised in the company of other young rhino calves before returning to the Addo Elephant National Park at ten months old to continue her hand-raising programme.

Black rhino are an endangered species and thus require special management to ensure each individual animal’s survival. The black rhino in Addo Elephant and Karoo National Parks belong to the *Diceros bicornis bicornis*, or so-called ‘desert-adapted’, subspecies, one of three subspecies of black rhino in Africa. Addo Elephant National Park is home to South Africa’s largest population of the *bicornis* subspecies rhino.

In 2005, Thandi was weaned from bottle-feeding and eventually released into the camp. Another two young black rhino cows joined Thandi in 2007 during a translocation of black rhino from Namibia to Addo Elephant and Karoo National Parks. This rhino translocation was part of a four-way partnership between South African National Parks, the Namibian Ministry of Environment & Tourism, the Zambian Wildlife Authority and the Eastern Cape Parks Board with the intention of exchanging rhino for antelope species between Namibia and Zambia.

“We use translocations of rhino as an important management tool to ensure genetic diversity in our metapopulation of *bicornis* subspecies black rhino in National Parks,” said Dr. Zimmerman.

During the capture process which took place on Monday 27 October, the three rhino cows were darted from a helicopter, and then handled by a ground capture team who took vital measurements. Veterinarians monitored the condition of the immobilised rhino while transmitters were inserted into their horns. The rhino were then revived and guided into crates which were then loaded onto a truck for the translocation journey. After a long journey by road, the three rhino were offloaded into the bomas at Karoo National Park in the early hours of this morning, 28 October.

The rhino remained in the Karoo bomas for a few weeks to allow them to acclimatise to the new surroundings. They were released into the 90 000-hectare Karoo National Park on 18 November.

The rhino are being monitored by Park rangers and researchers to ensure that they adapt well to their new home. Monitoring takes place by means of the transmitters inserted into the rhino horns as well as by tracking of spoor on the ground.

## A GIRL'S DREAM REALISED WITH A TRIP TO ADDO

The 16<sup>th</sup> of November was a special day for 13 year-old Shelbie Werth of Uitenhage; a day her dream came true at Addo Elephant National Park.

Through the Reach for a Dream foundation, Shelbie asked for a Game Drive and the Addo Elephant National Park stepped in to make this happen. Shelbie suffers from bronchiectasis which affects her airways and one remaining lung.

Shelbie and family, including her mom Debbie, dad Dean and sister Sarah, were treated to a guided game drive and a special visit to wildlife bomas in the Park where they were able to see some of the rehabilitation work that is done there. Shelbie took in all the sights and sounds of the Park including elephant, zebra, warthog, ostrich, tortoises and kudu.



Shelbie (left) and family on a game drive

The weather obliged with a sparkling sunny day after a week of rain and an elephant herd enjoying the mud at a waterhole provided good entertainment for Shelbie.

After the drive, the Werth family spent some time at the Park's underground viewing hide before enjoying lunch sponsored by the Park Restaurant. Shelbie was presented with fluffy elephant toys sponsored by the Park Shop to take home as a reminder of her visit. Both the restaurant and shop are managed by the Tigers Eye company.

When asked how she enjoyed the day, Shelbie's beaming smile said it all. The Addo Elephant National Park is very proud to have been part of making Shelbie's come true.

### 2009 DIARY

EVERY DAY	PARK OPEN FROM 07H00 – 19H00
31 JANUARY	HERALD VW CYCLE TOUR MOUNTAIN BIKE RACE in Zuurberg Area
2-3 MAY	ADDO ELEPHANT 100 MILER & 50 MILER TRAIL RUNS in Zuurberg Area
29 MAY	ADDO HONORARY RANGERS GOLF DAY in Port Elizabeth
26-28 JUNE	KIRKWOOD FESTIVAL & WILDLIFE AUCTION in Kirkwood
SEPTEMBER	SA NATIONAL PARKS WEEK – free entry for SA day visitors
23-25 OCTOBER	BIRDING WEEKEND
24 OCTOBER	MONDI ADDO MOUNTAIN BIKE CHALLENGE in Zuurberg Area

### NEW PICNIC SITE TO OPEN

A new picnic site for visitors will open in the Addo Elephant National Park on 22 December.

The picnic area, which has 18 sites, is located in the Botanical Reserve off the southern access road in the main game area of the Park. Visitors will be able to picnic and braai here between 8am and 5pm each day.

The remote location of the picnic area means that visitors can enjoy the sounds of the wild and views over the Park with that real “in the bush” feeling. Toilet facilities are available for the visitors’ convenience. Each site has a braai area with grid, table & benches and a small roof for shade. Two of the sites can accommodate larger groups.

“The new picnic site is a welcome and much-needed addition to Addo’s tourist facilities,” said Conservation Manager, John Adendorff.

“We urge visitors to take care when using the unfenced picnic site as predators such as lion and leopard do have access to the area. Visitors should remain aware of their surroundings at all times and report any predator sightings to the camp attendant immediately,” continued Adendorff.

Adendorff commented on the Park’s no bin policy at the site which aims to get visitors to take responsibility for the refuse they create. Visitors are required to take out all that they have brought in, including food products and leftovers, in order to protect wildlife from ingesting foreign materials and to reduce the visual impact of refuse.

“This no bin policy will also prevent animals such as vervet monkeys from becoming dependant on human food and will hopefully encourage people to recycle their refuse wherever possible,” said Adendorff.

The 400-hectare Botanical Reserve provides an important area for research on the impact that large herbivores such as elephants have on the thicket vegetation. Visitors should remain in the demarcated picnic area at all times, both for their own safety and to protect the pristine natural vegetation surrounding the site.

***Have you had your say on the Park’s web forums?***

***[www.sanparks.org/forums/](http://www.sanparks.org/forums/)***

*News from South African National Parks...*

### **First Brown Hyenas Introduced to Mountain Zebra National Park**

Three brown hyenas were introduced into Mountain National Park near Cradock in the second week of December, becoming the first of their kind to be released in the area.

Brown hyena (*Hyaena brunnea*) historically occurred in the area but were eradicated by hunting activities in the 1800s.

The three hyena – an adult male, adult female and young female – were translocated from Mafunyane Game Reserve in the Northwest Province in November this year.



The hyenas spent three weeks in a boma at Mountain Zebra National Park to allow them to acclimatise to the local conditions and the predator-proof fencing before their release.

All three hyena are collared to allow Park Rangers to track them via telemetry and satellite technology. This will enable the rangers to monitor the movements of the hyena to check whether they are settling down well in their new home and to determine what habitat they frequent.

The hyena will play an important role in the ecosystems in Mountain Zebra National Park in their role as scavengers that feed on dead material. The Park's cheetah, introduced in 2007, provide ample prey carcasses for scavengers such as hyena. The hyena also feed on insects, fruit and small mammals such as rodents, although predation makes up only about 6% of their diet.

A typical brown hyena population lives in small clans of related individuals led by an alpha female. When not at the clan's den, brown hyena are usually solitary foragers. The brown hyena is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.

Mountain Zebra National Park also opened a new swimming pool for day visitors at the Fonteinkloof Picnic Site on Wednesday, 17 December. The swimming pool will provide cool relief for visitors touring the Park on a day visit. Previously, only overnight visitors had access to a swimming pool located at the Park's family cottages.

Two new 4x4 trails were opened in the Park recently. Each of the 4x4 trails stretch over about 10 kilometres. One of the trails explores the Juriesdam plateau in the eastern area of the Park while the other is situated in the north-western area of the Park near Saltpeterskop.

Visitors to the Park can look out for some of the Park's 370 Cape mountain zebra, twelve cheetah, buffalo, black rhino and antelope such as black wildebeest, blesbok, springbok and mountain reedbuck. Three brown hyena were also recently introduced.

### **Suspension Bridge at Tsitsikamma National Park to Re-Open**

The original route to the suspension bridge at the Tsitsikamma National Park will re-open during the third week of December.

The boardwalk to the suspension bridge over the Stormsriver mouth was destroyed by a fire a few months ago and Park officials had no choice but to close access to the bridge.

Park Manager Darren Claassen said that once they received the geotechnical report, which confirmed that the land is stable, construction started immediately on the reconstruction of boardwalk. "The closure influenced visitor numbers to the Park and we have had numerous cancellations, especially from overseas tour groups as a result of the closure of the bridge. Construction is still in progress for a re-route, scheduled to be finished in April 2009. The finished product will form a circular route with two additional small suspension bridges as part of the route," said Claassen.

Regional Manager Mvusy Songelwa said that they managed to find additional funding that enabled them to start working on the original boardwalk immediately. "We received the safety go-ahead for the original route faster than anticipated and are happy that the bridge will be open for the upcoming peak tourist season. The circular route that will open in April will enhance visitors' experience, and we believe will be a great addition to the existing route."

### **New Garden Route Park is Here**

The proposal for proclaiming the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) was finally gazetted on the 21st of November and the proclamation of the Park is now only months away.

The new Garden Route National Park will be unique in the sense that the proximity of the residential areas on its periphery will definitely have an impact on the character of the park. It is therefore imperative that the local authorities and residents of the Garden Route realise that they have a

contribution to make to ensure that the integrity of the park stays intact, both from an environmental as well as social perspective. The emphasis will be on landscape conservation rather than the traditionally practiced conservation within a confined area.

Mvusy Songelwa, Regional Manager of SANParks Garden Route said it is an exciting challenge for the area. "The National Park will be made up of the currently proclaimed Tsitsikamma and Wilderness National Parks, the Knysna National Lake Area, the Southern Cape Indigenous Forests and the associated Fynbos Mountain Catchment Areas."

"The team in the Garden Route will be part of the coining of a unique conservation model in South Africa and Africa. The geographical diversity of these various areas makes for an exceptional conservation model. There will be no other National Park in South Africa that will include the unique combination of marine, coastal, lakes, indigenous forests and mountain catchment areas. The National Park will also not have any additional entrance gates and fences erected to mark its boundaries other than those already in place at the various camps. Our distinctive economic drive will be 'conservation without boundaries' in the landscape, unlike in other parks with fenced boundaries."

The statutory 60 days for public comment will apply and during this time SANParks Garden Route will host public information sessions, starting in January 2009. Songelwa said it is important that the community is part of the process. "We want to encourage the public to write their comments directly to the Department of Environmental Affairs as per the gazette requirement."

Once the 60 days period has expired and pending public comments to the Minister, the proclamation will follow suite. "We hope that the new National Park will be a reality by Easter 2009," said Songelwa.

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