

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Eastern Cape, South Africa

September/October 2009



About this newsletter

This is a general bimonthly newsletter 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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Photo: Johannes van Niekerk

NEW WILDLIFE AND ROADS FOR COLCHESTER AREA OF ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Addo Elephant National Park has introduced large wildlife species and opened up new tourist road loops in the Colchester area of the Park, south of the main game area.



Burchell's zebra being released into the Colchester area

Wildlife introductions culminated last week with the translocation of over 100 buffalo to this newly developed area of the Park. The buffalo, which are valuable in conservation terms due to their disease-free status, were moved from the Park's main game area by Park rangers and the SANParks game capture unit.

The translocation of buffalo followed the release of 80 red hartebeest, 40 Burchell's zebra and over 20 eland into the area. Some of the hartebeest were translocated from Mountain Zebra National Park, while the remainder of hartebeest, the zebra and eland were purchased through the World Project which is being implemented in the Park.

Seventeen kilometres of tourist roads leading off from the Park's Southern Access Road, have just been officially opened in this Colchester area, giving visitors a richer wildlife viewing experience while exploring this newly developed area of the Park.

In a recent development, R11.7 million worth of funds has been secured through the Department of Environmental Affairs' Expanded Public Works Programme for the construction of an additional 20 kilometres of roads in the Park's Colchester area. Construction on these new tourist roads will begin in January 2010.

The newly constructed roads have been named after significant characters in the Park's history. The Vukani Loop is named after Stephen Harold Trollope, the Park's first manager, who was known as "Vukani" (which means "get up" in Xhosa) by his rangers because of the way he called them to duty each morning. Harvey's Loop is named after the Harvey family who provided a refuge to the last 16 remaining elephants on his farm before the proclamation of the Park. The Harvey's farm was later incorporated into the Colchester area of the Park.



Park rangers prepare a boma for the release of eland, hartebeest and zebra into the Colchester area

Other road loops are named "Ngulube Loop" after the bushpig, "Mbotyi Loop", meaning bean (referring to the common Karoo boerbean tree *Schotia afra*) and "Ndlovu Lookout" after the elephant.

The Colchester area will see the return of elephants, lions and other wildlife when plans to take down fences between the Park's main game area and Colchester area are put into action. This is likely to take place late in 2010.

The Colchester area of the Park is accessible from the Matyholweni Gate, just off the N2 near the town of Colchester, about 40 km from Port Elizabeth, and includes the Matyholweni restcamp with its twelve chalets. Matyholweni gate has become a popular entrance to the Park for visitors from Port Elizabeth, who then drive through the Park to the main game area and exit via the main entrance gate.

MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHES MAYIBUYE COMPOST PROJECT

The Minister of Rural Development, Gugile Nkwinti, officially launched the Mayibuye Compost Project, a community venture aimed at providing employment to local people and enhancing the natural environment while producing top quality organic compost on 6 November.



Minister Gugile Nkwinti (centre) with Roland Carolus (MNDT Coordinator) (left) and John Linch (SRCC Board Chairman) at the Mayibuye Project Compost site

An amount of R6.7 million has been injected into the project, R4.7 million of which has been provided by the government through the European Union. A further 2 million is funded by the Sundays River Citrus Company (SRCC).

The compost project promises to employ 50 previously unemployed people from local communities surrounding the Addo Elephant National Park. Here, the population experiences an unemployment rate of up to 90% with 80% of the population only being seasonally employed for 6 months of the year by the citrus industry. As demand for the high quality organic compost grows, Mayibuye hopes to see the employment figures grow.

Speaking at the launch, the Minister of Rural Development said, “We must place this compost project in its proper context in terms of global warming and climate change, and this should be a focal point in marketing and branding the final product”.

The Minister said that the Mayibuye Compost Project should be seen as a sustainable business venture and not as a project with a fixed end date, adding that he would act as an ambassador of this venture.

Apart from employment of local people, the compost production project aims to address environmental concerns about invasive alien plants, particularly in the Sundays River system, which flows through the Addo Elephant National Park and Sundays River Valley.

Harvesting of invasive reeds from the Sundays River will be the first course of action to produce compost. Later compost will be produced by harvesting other alien invasive plants in national park and surrounds, as well as old redundant citrus orchards and wind breaks. The top quality compost will be purchased by citrus and vegetable farmers in the area.

The Mayibuye Ndlovu Development Trust (MNDT) was established in 1993 as a forum to plan and implement conservation-based community development projects in the communities living in and around the Addo Elephant National Park. With the active support of the South African National Parks (SANParks), MNDT aims to enhance the capacity and well-being of its local people and promote their sense of ownership of the local assets through the long-term and fair distribution of tangible economic benefits.



A compost turner at work

The AENP World Bank Expansion project, currently being implemented in the Addo Elephant National Park, has been instrumental in providing mentorship funding and support to transform Mayibuye into a sustainable commercial entity and provide funding for an administrator and coordinator.

MNDT’s first joint project with SANParks was a profit-sharing agreement which sees a percentage of the turnover of the Addo Elephant National Park’s Matyholweni restcamp being fed into the trust funds to be used for community projects.

MNDT now manages several community upliftment programmes which include a Student Assistance initiative aimed at enabling previously disadvantaged pupils to become part of economic activities by empowering them with tertiary education. MNDT is currently assisting 7 students to study at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth. In partnership with the Wilderness Foundation, MNDT is also enabling local community members to venture into new careers within the hospitality, ecotourism and conservation industries through extensive training programmes.

The SRCC, which is the single largest packer and exporter of citrus fruit in the Southern hemisphere, hopes the influx of quality compost will address both environmental concerns and the deteriorating state of productive soil in the Sundays River Valley.

DID YOU KNOW? ADDO’S CAPE FUR SEALS

Did you know that Addo Elephant National Park is home to the most easterly breeding colony of Cape fur seals?

While the Cape fur seals historically bred on all 7 islands in Algoa Bay, they now only breed on Black Rocks which is part of the Bird Island group. The Algoa Bay islands have been incorporated into the

Addo Elephant National Park since 2002. The Cape fur seal was a victim of sealing operations until 1956.



Cape fur seals. Photo: Dale Morris

Cape fur seals are the only seal species that breeds along the southern African coast. 95% of the Cape fur seal population is resident in the Benguela current waters along South Africa's west coast while only 5% are resident in the Agulhas current waters.

The population on Black Rocks numbers around 4 000 seals, with between 400 and 800 pups being born each year. The seals' pupping season extends from mid November to mid January. Pups are vulnerable to summer storms, accompanied by high swells, which wash them off the low-lying island and onto beaches along the coast.

Research is planned to determine the dynamics of the population and how they are affected by their environment, as well as competition with other predators such as great white sharks.

SA NATIONAL PARKS WEEK PROVIDES FREE ACCESS TO LOCALS

SANParks is celebrated Heritage and Tourism Month by offering South Africans the chance to experience their natural heritage for free during SA National Parks Week.

From Monday 14 September until Friday 18 September, locals with a South African identity document could enter Addo Elephant National Park free of charge for the day to enjoy wildlife viewing and the Park's facilities.

This presented the ideal opportunity for people to visit and get to know their national park which lies within an hour's drive from Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage and just over an hour's drive from Grahamstown.

As part of their free entry, visitors made use of the well-developed network of tourist roads, suitable for all types of vehicles, in the game area as well as facilities such as the picnic sites within the game area and at Addo main camp. Addo main camp offers a bird hide, underground hide and short walking trail while there are also day walking trails in the Zuurberg and Woody Cape areas of the Park. They had a chance of spotting the Big Five as well as zebra, antelope species and over 400 bird species which occur in the Park.



SA National Parks Week was launched in 2006 to encourage all South Africans to visit National Parks, out of the realisation that the majority of this country's citizens were not accessing parks. The objective of the week is to cultivate a culture of pride in all South Africans in their relationship with the country's natural, cultural and historical heritage, under the established theme "Know Your National Parks".

SANParks Chief Executive, Dr David Mabunda, said at the launch of SA National Parks Week in Kruger National Park that this week offers an opportunity for all South Africans to develop a sense of pride

which culminates in renewed and improved efforts towards taking care of the country's conservation resources. "Through this project, we also aim at building stronger constituencies and ambassadors of conservation and the environment."

"The survival of the South African national parks system and our natural and cultural heritage lies in the people of South Africa and this year we are focusing on involving young people and communities, to cultivate a knowledge of the importance of conservation and an appreciation for the country's natural heritage", added Dr. Mabunda.

SA National Parks Week is an opportunity to showcase all national parks as key and affordable local holiday destinations, offering a unique experience, especially for families. All South Africans are encouraged to take the opportunity to experience an encounter with wildlife.

EDEN TO ADDO MEGAHIKE FOR CONSERVATION

On 23 September 2009, 24 weary but triumphant hikers, accompanied by 4 guides, arrived in the Kabouga Area of Addo Elephant National Park at the culmination of the Eden to Addo Megahike.



The hikers had walked for 18 days, covering close to 400km over mountains, rivers, through wilderness areas, farms, private game reserves and National Parks to raise awareness about the Eden to Addo Biodiversity Corridor. Hikers covered an average distance of 20-

26 km per day, with the shortest day being about 12km and the longest 35 km.

The aim of the hike is to raise awareness about conservation and the possibility of individuals creating conservation corridors with private land.

The Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative (a Section 21 NGO) is a civil society conservation initiative that aims to create an effective pattern of habitats stretching from Wilderness Lakes in the Eden District to Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape, ensuring ecological connectivity for species, communities and ecological processes.

The first Eden to Addo Megahike took place in 2006 when 47 hikers completed the hike to Addo Elephant National Park. 2010's Eden to Addo Megahike will celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity. Find out more at www.edentoaddo.co.za

NEW SIGHTINGS OF AFRICAN CUCKOO HAWK

Unusual sightings of the African cuckoo hawk *Aviceda cuculoides* have been repeatedly recorded in the Nyathi area of the Park recently, according to Charles Marais, one of the Addo Honorary Rangers and a local bird expert. The African cuckoo hawk was previously only recorded in the Park in the Woody Cape forest.

These new Nyathi sightings of the hawk have been recorded on the margins of the arboreal thicket, a forest-like environment which shares many species with the lower-lying thicket habitat of the area.

Following the Addo Honorary Rangers' successful birding weekend in October, the Park's bird list will once again be updated with new bird records.

KUZUKO LODGE TAKES STOCK OF REPTILES

Kuzuko Lodge, situated in the Kuzuko Contractual Area, in the north-western area of Addo Elephant National Park, was fortunate enough to receive a recent visit from renowned reptile expert and author, Johan Marais.

Johan Marais, author of "A Guide to the Reptiles of Southern Africa", assisted the guides at Kuzuko Lodge to identify and record reptiles encountered in this area of the Park.

The preliminary list of reptiles is as follows:

1. Spotted Harlequin Snake (*Homoroselaps lacteus*),
2. Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammophis notostrictus*),
3. Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*),
4. Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*),
5. Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*),
6. Southern Rock Agama (*Agama atra*),
7. Common Ground Agama (*Agama aculeata*),
8. Rock Monitor (*Varanus albigularis*),
9. Cape Girdled Lizard (*Cordylus cordylus*).



Spotted Harlequin Snake (above) and Puff Adder (below)



2010 AENP DIARY

6 FEB 2010	HERALD MOUNTAIN BIKE RACE in Zuurberg Area
1 MAY 2010	100MILER & 50MILER TRAIL RUNS in Kabouga & Zuurberg Area
4- 6 JUNE 2010	KIRKWOOD WILDLIFE FESTIVAL & AUCTION in Kirkwood
11 JUNE 2010	FIFA WORLD CUP SOCCER TOURNAMENT STARTS
12 JUNE 2010	FIRST FIFA WORLD CUP MATCH IN PORT ELIZABETH
SEPTEMBER 2010	EDEN TO ADDO MEGAHIKE
SEPTEMBER 2010	SA NATIONAL PARKS WEEK
EVERY DAY	MAIN GATE OPEN FROM 07H00 – 19H00
	MATYHOLWENI GATE OPEN 07H00 – 16H00
	GAME AREA GATE OPEN ACCORDING TO SEASON (please check times)
	SOUTHERN GATE OPEN ACCORDING TO SEASON (please check times)
	PICNIC SITE IN GAME AREA OPEN 08H00 – 16H00

News from South African National Parks...

Karoo National Park to Introduce Lions to Mark 30th Anniversary

Karoo National Park, situated near Beaufort West, celebrated its 30th Anniversary on 29 October with the announcement that lions would be introduced to the Park in 2010.



Regional Manager Lucius Moolman (right) hands over Kuduzelas to District Mayor Truman Prince and local Mayor Juliet Jonas at the celebrations

Speaking on behalf of South African National Parks (SANParks) executive management, Dr. Nomvuselelo Songelwa made the announcement at an event held today to commemorate 30 years of the Park's existence after its proclamation on 12 September 1979.

"The introduction of lions will bring back a historically-occurring species to the Great Karoo ecosystem," said Songelwa.

Songelwa added that the introduction would take place in the first half of 2010 once measures had been put in place to ensure the safety of visitors walking around the Park's rest camp. The decision had been made after careful consideration of the

viability of introducing this top predator, taking into account the numbers of prey species most likely to be targeted by lions in the Park.

Truman Prince, Executive Mayor of the Central District Municipality, opened the celebrations with a welcome speech. Prince pledged the full support of the District and Local Municipality for Park conservation initiatives in general, as well as a specific fencing issue delaying the full completion of the Park's predator-proof fencing.

Upon receiving a Kuduzela from the Park Manager, Prince – an Executive member of the South African Football Association - declared that he would put it into use at Bafana Bafana's next match against Japan.

Beaufort West Executive Mayor, Juliet Jonas, highlighted the contribution to the Park's existence by the local community which commenced in 1976 with the donation of communal land to form the core of the Park prior to proclamation.

Jonas also expanded on the role that national parks play, saying: "Like the Karoo National Park, all national parks lie at the centre of our South African character. They reflect and strengthen our sense of place; they protect and support our unmatched biodiversity and increasingly, they anchor growth, job creation and hope through tourism for our communities."



Park Rangers demonstrate their skills

SANParks Regional Manager, Lucius Moolman, declared that the cooperation with and support from local government was "the best experienced by any national park in the country".

Mzwandile Mjadu, Karoo National Park Manager, expanded on the major developments and achievements in the Park over the 30 years of its existence.

Highlights included the opening of the Park's rest camp in 1989, the opening of SANParks first-ever 4x4 trail in 1992 and the opening of the first Braille fossil trail in the world in 1994. More recent developments of tourist facilities include the opening of the Interpretive Centre in 2005, Bulkraal picnic site and swimming pool in 2006 and Grantham Environmental Education Centre and in 2008. New 4x4 eco-trails and overnight facilities were opened earlier this year.

Mjadu praised the Karoo National Park management and staff over the years for their dedication and service to SANParks, saying this is what had led the Park to its current success. Testament to the improvements in tourism facilities is the increase in visitor numbers by 26% and an increase in accommodation unit occupancy by 5% over six months.

Karoo National Park's rangers put on a parade to demonstrate their skills while the Park's choir entertained guests with a few songs.

New Entrance Gate, Roads Opened at Mountain Zebra National Park

Mountain Zebra National Park, situated near Cradock in the Eastern Cape, celebrated the official opening of a newly upgraded entrance gate and the complete renovation of its tourist roads on 28 October.

The project to renovate the tourist roads was completed in just over a year, involving the upgrade of 42.7 km of existing gravel roads and the construction of 13.4 km of new roads. "Visitors can now explore all areas of the Park for wildlife viewing on roads suitable for all vehicle types, " said Lucius Moolman, South African National Parks (SANParks) Regional Manager, as he officially opened the roads.



Vehicles on the newly upgraded Rooiplaat Loop

Cutting the ribbon on the newly constructed Link Road, Moolman added that the new 13.4 km road provided an important link between the Ubejane and Rooiplaat Loops, making travelling around the Park easier. The road upgrade project, funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs' Infrastructure Development Programme saw 40 local people being employed with a spend of R11 million.

Dr. Paul Du Plessis Kruger, former Sasol Chairman, officially opened the Park's newly upgraded entrance gate – now named the Sasol Gate - in recognition of Sasol's contribution to Park expansion made just over 10 years ago.

Sasol provided funds at a crucial stage of Park development to purchase a property that was on the market. This donation, along with other donations and fund-raising initiatives initiated by SANParks and the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, helped to increase the Park size from 6 536 hectares to over 28 000 hectares. Organisations such as the Barbara Delano Foundation, WildAid and Vesta Medicines also played an important role.

This Park expansion facilitated the reintroduction of species such as buffalo, cheetah and brown hyena and assured the conservation of the endangered Cape mountain zebra, which now number over 500 in the Park.

Park Manager Lesley-Ann Meyer said she was proud to announce that the renovations to infrastructure had already succeeded in increasing both day and overnight visitor numbers. "Visitors to Mountain Zebra National Park can now enjoy the full spectrum of wildlife viewing and landscapes," said Meyer.

Visitor numbers have increased by a massive 40% and occupancy rate has increased from 61% to 70% for the first six months of the financial year.

Speaking about future plans, Moolman announced that the plans to link Mountain Zebra National Park to Camdeboo National Park in Graaff-Reinet to form a mega-conservation area of about 300 000 hectares had now been officially declared by SANParks. These plans envisaged a linkage formed through contractual agreements with private game reserves and landowners, some of whom had already expressed interest in the idea.

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