

# NEWS FROM THE ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK, South Africa *July/Aug 2007*



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## *About this newsletter*

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

## **BUFFALO DRAW EXCELLENT PRICES AT WILDLIFE AUCTION**

The Annual Kirkwood Wildlife Auction once again attracted much interest, with Addo Elephant National Park buffalo selling for excellent prices.

The top price was reached for a family group of two cows and a buffalo bull, which sold for R210 000 each. A total of 21 buffalo - four family groups and seven bulls - were sold on the auction, at an average price of just under R145 000 per animal.

Red hartebeest and black wildebeest also fetched good prices. The top price for the 31 red hartebeest sold was R3 600 per animal while the top price for the 30 black wildebeest sold was R3 750.

Twenty white rhino from Kruger National Park were auctioned, with a top selling price of R325 000.

All funds generated from the auction - the country's second-largest - are fed into the Park Development Fund, a central fund used by SANParks to expand national parks across the country.

## **IDENTIFICATION PROJECT: BLACK RHINO, LEOPARD & SPOTTED HYENA**

Black rhino, leopard and spotted hyena are some of the most elusive species in the Park. Individuals are not often sighted.

However, it is important for conservation staff to monitor these species, particularly the black rhino, which is an endangered species. Data such as number and condition of adults and juveniles and location of animals is important in order to inform management decisions.

The Park has therefore called upon all visitors to the Park to assist in creating an identification database for these three species. Visitors can assist by taking clear photographs of rhino, leopard and hyena when seen in the Park, recording the date, time and location of the animals.

Photos (of not more than 1MB in size per email) and information can then be emailed to [meganb@sanparks.org](mailto:meganb@sanparks.org)

For black rhino, it is important to record the ear notches, while for hyena, the spot pattern on the coat is important for identification.

Information gathered will be used to create an identification database of individuals and map home ranges/territories, complementing information gathered by field rangers, researchers and volunteers in the Park.

## **LION OF ADDO**

Since their introduction in 2003, the lions of the Addo Elephant National Park have adjusted well to their new home, successfully hunting for prey and raising cubs.

The six lions, all captured from different locations in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, have formed two male coalitions - one dominant and one subordinate - with the two females associating sporadically with the dominant male pair.

The first cubs born in the park - named Matt, Gina and Amla - have now reached two years of age. Matt and Amla were recently transferred to the Kuzuko Contractual Area of the Park adjacent to Darlington Dam in the north to form a new pride nucleus. Kuzuko is currently fenced off from the rest of the Park, although there are plans to remove the fence line separating it in the long-term.

Ardlam, the younger of the two introduced lionesses, bore her first cubs some eight months ago. The sex of the two cubs is still unknown and they have therefore yet to be named.

Kamkwa, the older lioness, recently showed signs of having given birth to and suckling new cubs. However, recent sightings of the lioness have showed no more signs, indicating that the cubs may have been killed.

Male lions are well known for killing cubs that they have not fathered in order to bring the lioness back into breeding condition, thus ensuring that their own genes can be passed on.

Spotted hyenas are also known for killing the cubs of their arch-enemy when they find them.

## **FAECAL ANALYSIS GIVES INSIGHT INTO ADDO ELEPHANT POPULATION**

Researchers in the Addo Elephant National Park are investigating the presence and levels of various hormones in elephant dung to create a more detailed picture of how the Addo elephant population functions.

Collecting faecal samples from known individuals is one of the most powerful tools available in wildlife research because of its enormous utility and non-invasive nature. A faecal sample can provide information on the sex, DNA, reproductive status, stress levels, diet and general health condition of an individual. Some of the topics on which researchers focus are the onset of sexual maturity, occurrence of ovulation and pregnancy, fetal abortion, duration of post parturition/lactational anoestrus and the affect of dominance on reproductive cycles.

Questions such as whether dominance of an elephant cow affects her oestrus periods and the length of time between successive calves and whether rainfall patterns influence conception and birthing intervals will be asked.

Using newly developed technology, researchers from the Smithsonian National Zoological Park in the USA can now analyse fresh dung samples in field. Previously, techniques were not field-friendly because they required specialized equipment and complicated sample processing procedures. Samples had to be exported from the field to a laboratory in the USA, which was expensive, time consuming and logistically difficult.

The new technology was developed by modifying an enzymimmunoassay (EIA) technique to create a rapid field kit that analyzes hormones in fresh faecal samples onsite.

The dung analysis will also be extended to investigate similar issues in the Park's black rhino population. The collection of information from the dung of this often elusive animal will significantly aid monitoring of the health and reproductive status of what is a critically endangered species.

Funded by the National Science Foundation in the USA, researchers from Georgia South University attempt to analyse the exact chemical composition of musth and oestrus pheromones found in urine. Once these chemical compounds have been identified, they could be reproduced for use in conflict situations.

In areas where elephants and humans live alongside each other, there are often clashes when elephants raid crops and water sources. A chemical compound could then be used in conjunction with mechanical barriers to discourage elephants from moving into human settlements.

Another focus of this research, which commenced in 2003, is the sexual dimorphism that is present in juvenile elephants. From as young an age as two years, male and female elephants begin to exhibit different types of behaviour, practising for their adult roles. Males begin to engage in mock-fighting and independent behaviour while females tend to engage in mothering roles and focus on cementing family bonds.

### **DON'T MISS ADDO'S BIRDING BONANZA**

Bookings are streaming in for Addo Elephant National Park's inaugural Birding Bonanza to be held from the 26th to 28th of October.

The event, sponsored by Sasol and Glendower Scotch Whisky, will see birders from all over the country traversing the length and breadth of the Park to record bird species.

Birders will have the chance to spot over 400 species of birds in five different biomes including Thicket, Fynbos, Grassland, Forest and Nama Karoo, as well as sandy beach, estuarine, freshwater and marine habitats

There will be special offers such as a guided 4x4 trail through the spectacular Zuurberg Mountains, ending at Darlington Lake in the Karoo. Guided horseback trails through mountain fynbos and afro-montane forest will be on offer, as well as a guided visit by boat to the marine section of the Park in Algoa Bay. The boat trip will include a visit to St Croix Island with fantastic sightings of African Penguins on offer, as well as several pelagic seabirds en route to and from the islands. This will be an unforgettable experience with the chance of seeing whales, dolphins and sharks.

Those who opt for the regular package will be guided through a variety of different habitats. For the fit and energetic, birding on foot in the Zuurberg mountains will take you through a variety of biomes.

The Birding Bonanza will include two social evenings with speakers and delicious bush food and refreshments. Accommodation to suit all preferences and budgets is available in the Park.

So don't miss this great opportunity, book now for the Birding Bonanza!

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### **ANNUAL CENSUS FIGURES**

Figures from the annual game census in the Park have now become available. The census, carried out in March, is conducted using a helicopter. The figures represented below may not be accurate due to the difficulty of counting game in areas with thick vegetation cover.

<i>Species</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Number</i>
Buffalo	329	Red Hartebeest	283
Bushbuck	36	Kudu	902
Bushpig	2	Ostrich	99
Duiker	9	Rhino	9
Eland	54	Warthog	723
Elephant	316	Zebra	47

Ground counts of elephant have confirmed that a total of 374 elephants are present in the main game area of the Park, with another 83 in the Nyati concession area and 15 in the Kuzuko area.

### **HUMMER LAUNCH**

General Motors used the Park as a backdrop for the launch of their new Hummer 3 vehicle, now being manufactured in nearby Port Elizabeth.

After contracts were signed, the party headed out to Domkrag waterhole for a photo session where an elephant conveniently strolled across the landscape.

The Hummer vehicle - with its five-star comfort (including heated seats!) and powerful 4x4 capabilities - will be used to offer a luxury guided 4x4 trips over the Zuurberg Mountains of the Park.

These trips will become available in the near future and will be booked through the Park's game drive office.

*News from South African National Parks...*

### **Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 'Goes Wild' and joins the Wild Card Programme**

Not only will your Wild Card give you access to SANParks, CapeNature, Msinsi Resorts & Reserves and Big Game Parks of Swaziland but as of 1 August 2007 your Wild Card will give you access to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as well.

What does this exciting news mean to you, our valued Wild Cardholder? If you currently have an ALL Cluster Wild Card you will be entitled to free entry into Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Parks (excluding Parks that fall under the Greater St.Lucia Wetlands Park authority) for the remainder of the validity of your Wild Card. If you have an Individual Cluster and wish to upgrade your Wild Card to an ALL Cluster contact the Infinity Contact Centre on 086 123 4002. (Please note that upgrades can only take place through the Infinity Contact Centre.) If Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is your passion then you can purchase an Ezemvelo KZN Cluster Wild Card. The choice is all yours.

With the inclusion of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife your ALL Cluster Wild Card now allows you access to 88 parks in total. Now that is value for money!

A taste of what Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has to offer you:

- Mpila Camp, Imfolozi Game Reserve. 'Imfolozi', the heart of the Zulu Kingdom, where Zulu kings such as Dingiswayo and Shaka hunted and put in place the first conservation laws. Home of the White Rhino, where wilderness trails take you along mighty rivers wandering through thorn savannah inhabited by the Big Five of African legend. Part of the Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park, proclaimed in 1895 and the oldest game reserve in Africa.
- Hilltop Camp, Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Hilltop camp is magnificently situated on a spur of the Ngalonde Hill commanding sweeping views across the Hluhluwe section of the HIP Park, where the Big Five roam the savannah. Game viewing is the prime attraction. Several viewpoints enable visitors to see animals at close range.
- Thendele Camp, Royal Natal. Situated in the north Berg region of the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park, a World Heritage Site, Royal Natal offers some of the most splendid mountain scenery in Africa. The main feature is the world famous Amphitheatre, a rock wall approximately five km in length, and 500m high. The most popular activity at Royal Natal is undoubtedly hiking.

This great new offering does not stop here; you will also gain free access to the following parks: Amatigulu, Chelmsford, Cobham, Garden Castle, Harold Johnson, Highmoor, Injisuthi, Kamberg, Kenneth Stainbank, Lotheni, Ndumo, Monk's Cowl, Mount Currie, Oribi Gorge, Phongola, Umlalazi, Royal Natal, Rugged Glen, Spioenkop, Vernon Crookes, Wagendrift, Weenen.

If you have any further queries regarding Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife visit their website on [www.kznwildlife.com](http://www.kznwildlife.com) or contact their reservations on 033 845 1000.

### **Kruger National Park Breaches Dam to Prevent Poison Spreading**

A key dam in the Southern area of the Kruger National Park (KNP), the Nhlanguanzwane Dam will be breached this week in order to rid it of an algal poison that has claimed the lives of a number of animals over the past two years.

"We didn't take the decision to breach the dam lightly, but our primary concern is to stop the spread and effect of this deadly algal poison," said the KNP's Head of Conservation Services Dr Freek Venter.

KNP rangers first picked up the problem during autumn and early winter of 2005, when carcasses were found in the region. As they were already several days old, the cause of death could not be determined

When a fresh carcass was discovered, a full range of tests were conducted and it was found that the animal had *Microcystis* poisoning. During that time, the water level of this and other dams in the area were also unusually low and a high number of hippos (100) also inhabited the dam.

These large hippo densities probably resulted in higher levels of urinary and faecal eutrophication which, in turn, resulted in an abnormally high level of the algae *Microcystis* spp. A total of 54 carcasses were detected during the 2005 outbreak and these included white rhinos, lions, cheetahs and zebras.

Various options were considered at the time but nature found its own solution. The areas around the dam were overgrazed and a veld fire in the area meant that the hippo population dispersed to the Sabie and Crocodile Rivers and the algal reduced significantly which resulted in mortalities decreasing to zero after July 2005.

Roughly two years later, June 2007, mortalities were again discovered in the area of the Nhlanguanzwane Dam, these included white rhinos, zebras and wildebeest and again a high population of hippos, plus the algae *Microcystis* spp have been noted in this and other dams in the area.

"These discoveries meant that KNP management were faced with various options, which included fencing off the dam which isn't practical because of the large amount of elephants in the area and removing the hippo, which is also not practical because past experience shows that the hippo return soon afterwards, thus we took the decision to breach the dam," Dr Venter concluded.

Construction machines will be on site until Monday August 6, 2007.

The closure of the dam also ties in with the KNP's policy of closing artificial water points in order to return the area to its purest natural state.

Nhlanganzwane Dam is situated in the extreme South Eastern area of the KNP to the South of Lower Sabie Rest Camp and to the North East of Crocodile Bridge Rest Camp and Entrance Gate.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

✂ The telephone numbers for Addo Elephant National Park have changed. Please dial +27(0)42 2338600 or send your fax to +27(0)42 2338643.

✂ You can help purchase a webcam for Addo Elephant National Park by making a donation online at [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org)

✂ You can have your say or simply read what others have to say on our website forums. Visit [www.sanparks.org/forums](http://www.sanparks.org/forums)

✂ You can check availability of accommodation in any of the 20 South African National Parks by clicking on the link below, then choosing the park and rest camp you wish to investigate:

[www.sanparks.org/tourism/availability/default.php](http://www.sanparks.org/tourism/availability/default.php)

The information is updated once a day at 08h00. This will save you time when making your booking. To book, email [reservations@sanparks.org](mailto:reservations@sanparks.org) or Tel: +27 (0)12 4289111.

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***Learn more about your natural and cultural heritage at [www.addoelephantpark.com](http://www.addoelephantpark.com) and [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org)***