

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK



Eastern Cape, South Africa
August / September 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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REIGN OF FIRE



Rangers battled the blaze for days

on Fire teams battled the blaze. Extremely dry conditions and strong winds hampered their efforts and the fires were fanned by frequent changes in wind direction.

None of the Park's tourist or staff accommodation or infrastructure was affected, although visitors were evacuated from Narina Bush Camp on one occasion as a precaution. The Zuurberg Mountain Village, which is a private business located on the borders of the Park has sustained considerable damage, losing 31 chalets to the fire.

The second fire of significance started on Sunday 14 September and burnt until Tuesday 23 September. It was started by lightning and burnt grassland and fynbos in the Zuurberg Mountains from Zuurberg section to Kabouga and almost over to the Darlington side.

Two bouts of fire in August and September have burnt vast tracts of the Zuurberg Mountain range in the Park. The fires burnt some 26 000 hectares of fynbos and grassland on the Zuurberg Mountains. Fire is a natural occurrence in both fynbos and grassland ecosystems and is vital for the proper functioning of these systems.

The first fire, started by unknown causes on a property bordering the Park, burnt from the 10th until the 15th of August, spreading into the Nyathi and Zuurberg sections of the Park. Park rangers, assisted by Cacadu District fire teams and Working



Fires burnt in largely inaccessible areas of the Zuurberg Mountains

Most of the efforts of Park rangers were focused on assisting farmers on the borders of the Park to prevent the fire spreading onto their land. Again, none of the Park infrastructure or accommodation facilities were affected.

Smaller animals such as tortoises, snakes and rodents were probably most affected by the fire. Larger animals such as eland, kudu, red hartebeest and bushbuck are usually able to escape to the forest in the mountain valleys. Forest does not burn very easily so provides some sanctuary to wildlife in times of fire.

Since these fires, the vegetation on the mountain has been slowly regenerating. Fire lilies (*Cyrtanthus* species) have bloomed in bright reds and grass has sent up new shoots.

HIGH SEAS DAMAGE BIRD ISLAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Addo Elephant National Park rangers were evacuated from Bird Island in Algoa Bay on Monday the 1st of September when high seas caused the water level to move about 15 meters inland.



High seas damaged the jetty at Bird Island

The rangers were evacuated by means of a helicopter provided by the SA Defense Force as the Park's boat could not be mobilized in the 9-metre high seas. Before their evacuation, the rangers reported that the sea water had reached the back of the lighthouse building and the front of buildings that house staff on the island.

The Park's rangers were able to return to Bird Island on Tuesday afternoon, the 2nd of September, again by helicopter, to assess the damage caused to both infrastructure and the birds that breed on the island.

African penguin chicks, aged between two and four months old, were drowned by waves which flooded their nests. However, the extent of penguin chick deaths is difficult to estimate as their bodies were washed away.

Rangers captured some adult penguins with broken legs which were taken off the island for rehabilitation. The African penguin colony on Bird Island numbers about 2 675 breeding pairs.

The Cape gannet breeding colony on Bird Island – the largest of its kind in the world at about 80 000 pairs – was not affected by the high seas except for flooding of some peripheral nest sites by sea spray. Rangers took measures to drain these sites.

Black Rocks, which houses a 400-strong colony of Cape fur seals, was completely submerged by the high seas, as were Stag and Seal Islands which lie close to Bird Island.

There was also extensive damage, estimated at up to R1 million, to the newly constructed jetty on Bird Island with gabions broken and washed away. The damage will not affect Park ranger patrols in the marine area.



African penguins on Bird Island

ARE YOU UP FOR THE “TOUGHEST MOUNTAIN BIKE CHALLENGE”?

Spring is in the air and there is a brand new mountain bike race taking place in the Eastern Cape: “The Mondi Packaging Addo Mountain Bike Challenge”.

This 1-Day event will be held in the rugged Zuurberg Mountain region of the Addo Elephant National Park, Eastern Cape, on Saturday, 1st November 2008.



55km & 85km cyclists will ride through the rugged Zuurberg Mountains

This race, billed as the Eastern Cape’s “toughest Mountain Bike Challenge”, offers mountain bikers a chance to pedal through some magnificent scenery inside the Addo Elephant National Park, and includes climbing the historic Zuurberg Pass, hand-built by convict labourers in the 1860’s.

With a total of R50 000 in prize monies up for grabs and a first prize of R15 000 in the 85km race, the event promises a lot of action.

As the main sponsor, Mondi Packaging’s objectives are to create a top quality Mountain

Biking event that can feature as an annual event on the national cycling calendar with the potential of becoming a multi-day event in the future. They also hope to create awareness within the local community of the Sponsor’s commitment to contribute to the development of the local community by promoting events that involve the local community and draw visitors to the area, thereby increasing the local revenue.

The Mayibuye Ndlovu Development Trust – a trust comprised of representatives of the communities surrounding Addo Elephant National Park - and a National charity, CHOC (Childhood Cancer Foundation) are beneficiaries of the event.

The Event Sponsors will also endeavour to assist four Development Cyclists, selected by the Addo Elephant National Park from the local community, by providing them with bicycles and cycling kit to take part in the inaugural event. This will be a long-term project to help develop mountain biking within the local Addo community.

The race is comprised of 3 different routes: an undemanding 30km route over gravel roads and tracks for the social rider and their family members; a 55km trail with a reasonable level of technical difficulty for the avid mountain bike enthusiast, recreational mountain bike riders and sporting celebrities who enjoy a challenge and an extreme route of 85 km with a high level of technical difficulty to attract the country’s professional and top amateur mountain bike riders to the event.

This route includes gravel roads, jeep track and awesome single track. There are also some extremely steep single track down-hills with switch-backs, river crossings and over 1700m of climbing.

The event organisers, Leisure Cycle Tours & Adventures have also included a Kiddies Fun Challenge for little ones under the age of 8 years. There will also be a family festival at the start / finish venue with plenty of entertainment, food & drink stands, a beer tent, children’s games and family activities. An overnight campground is provided at the venue with “Fireside Cycling Stories” around the campfire on Friday night.

For more information and to book your place online, visit www.leisurecycletours.com or email info@leisurecycletours.com or call Shane on +27 74 114 4811.

CONSERVATION & TOURISM HIGHLIGHTS

The Park's achievements and milestones of the past six months (April – September 2008):

- Four spotted hyena and three lion cubs were born. Five cheetah cubs were born in the Kuzuko Contractual Area – the first cheetah ever to be born in the Park.
- Addo Elephant National Park is home to more than half the population of the black rhino *bicornis* subspecies (or so-called desert-adapted rhino) in South Africa.
- The Coast Care programme cleaned up 4356 kg's of waste from the Sundays beach area.
- 5 762 children and 611 adults participated in environmental education programmes in the Park.
- The unit occupancy in Camp Matyholweni rose (compared to last year) by 11% to 52.8% while camping occupancy rose by 4% to 52.8%.
- 53 369 people visited the Park from April to September, representing a drop of 8.1% compared to the same period in 2007. This is the result of the Easter weekend – a very popular holiday time – falling in March (whereas it was in April last year) as well as the effect of an increase in fuel costs.
- Only 67.6 mm of rain was recorded in the Addo section of the Park, compared to the long term average (average over 10 years) for April to September of 165.1 mm

HOP-ON GUIDES AND MARINE RANGERS SEE INTO THE FUTURE WITH DONATION

Addo Elephant National Park's Hop-on Guides have received a boost with a donation of two pairs of binoculars from Mr. John Walton of the UK.



Hop-on Guide Elliot Masewu (left) receives binoculars from John Walton

Walton, who accepted the binoculars on behalf of the Marine Rangers.

The Hop-on Guides are a group of local community members who provide guiding services to visitors in the comfort of their own vehicles. While they run their own business, Addo Elephant National Park provides support in terms of marketing, training and the provision of an operating base.

The Park's Marine Rangers received a very welcome donation of two pairs of water-resistant binoculars as well as six waterproof cases for storage of equipment during marine patrols.

"The binoculars are a very useful addition to our equipment and will prove vital in our efforts to apprehend marine offenders", said John Adendorff, Addo Elephant National Park's Conservation

Walton also handed over a pair of binoculars to William Dodo, a community elder who acts as a guide in the Park's Imbewu programme. Dodo leads groups of high school learners on three-day trips into the Park to sleep under the stars and learn about nature as well as their cultural legacy.

Addo Elephant National Park's game drive guides received a fourth pair of binoculars.

"I hope that this donation will encourage visitors who support conservation to make similar contributions where they have the means to do so", said John Walton.

Walton, who is involved in law enforcement in the UK, recently visited the Park to hand over the binoculars and also to enjoy a holiday with his wife.

SA NATIONAL PARKS WEEK SUCCESS

2670 people took advantage of this year's SA National Parks Week to visit Addo Elephant National Park for a free day visit.

SA National Parks Week took place from 22 to 28 September, with free entrance offered to all South African residents for day visits from Monday to Friday of the week.

The Park's People & Conservation department brought in seven groups, numbering 234 people, from local communities for a tour of the Park. They also organized a beach cleanup to tie in with International Coastal Cleanup Day. Colchester Primary School and Park rangers cleaned a piece of the Park's coast line stretching east from the Sundays River mouth.

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 the 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".

Speaking from SANParks head office in Groenkloof National Park, Pretoria, Dr Mabunda, Chief Executive of SANParks said: "SA National Parks Week offers an opportunity for all South Africans to experience their national parks and to then develop a sense of pride which culminates to renewed and improved efforts by all South Africans, 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".

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

www.sanparks.org/forums/

News from South African National Parks...

Karoo National Park Celebrates New Road, Education Centre and Fence Line

The occasion was festive as sprightly young Khoi dancers from Nelspoort kicked off the celebrations at Karoo National Park on 2 October at the opening of a new tourist road, environmental education centre and the completion of a new predator-proof fence line.

Speaking at the celebrations, Managing Executive: Parks, Paul Daphne, thanked the Department of Environmental



The Skomarom dancers opened celebrations

The Skomarom dancers opened celebrations

Affairs & Tourism (DEAT) for facilitating the new developments through the Expanded Public Works poverty relief programme.

“Job creation and accompanying skills development was one of the primary aims of these projects and this has had a significant impact on communities in a region which has been identified as one of the Presidential poverty nodes in South Africa”, said Daphne.

A total of 435 people from local communities were employed on the roads, fence and education centre projects over a period of three years during which just over R28 million was invested.

Daphne added that one of the ways in which the Park benefits local communities is by growing the tourism economy in the region.

As Daphne and the Executive Mayor of Beaufort West Municipality, Juliet Jonas, cut the ribbon to officially open the new 45-kilometre tourist road, Park Manager, Mzwandile Mjadu, explained that the road would open up a new area of the Park to visitors, enriching their experience.

Named the Potlekkertjie Loop, after the local name for one of the common lizards in the Park, the road takes the visitor through the Park’s western region.



Managing Executive: Parks Paul Daphne (left) and Executive Mayor Juliet Jonas opened the Potlekkertjie Loop Road

With the flick of a switch, the Executive Mayor later activated the newly completed predator-proof fence line which spans some 138 kilometres around the Park. The fence line has been erected ahead of the Park’s plans to introduce cheetah and brown hyena within the next two years.

With the new road and completed fence line, SANParks hopes to encourage visitors to spend two to three nights in the Karoo National Park, instead of the traditional one-night stopover.

The celebrations culminated at the opening of the new Grantham Environmental Education Centre. The centre, a restored farmstead which can accommodate up to 50 children, currently plays host to the “Kids in Parks” environmental education programme, sponsored by SANParks, DEAT, the Department of Education and Pick ‘n Pay.

“The Grantham Environmental Education Centre will hopefully become a popular venue for both school groups and community groups in the future, a place where they can experience the tranquility of the karoo and the wonders of our natural heritage”, said Park Manager, Mzwandile Mjadu.

It was not only Karoo National Park who celebrated on the day, as a school group from the local St. Matthews School was in residence at Grantham Environmental Education Centre as part of their 100-year celebrations. Regional Manager, Lucius Moolman, handed over a “happy birthday” cake to two St. Matthews’ learners. Later, Paul Daphne and Juliet Jonas planted the first two of the 100 trees to be planted in the Grantham grounds to mark the occasion.

The Karoo National Park covers almost 90 000 hectares of land and is home the country’s largest herd of endangered Cape mountain zebra, as well as black rhino and various antelope species such as eland, gemsbok, klipspringer and springbok. The Park is well known for its rich fossil record and boasts a wheelchair-friendly Fossil Trail.

SANParks Announces Early Rate Increase

South African National Parks (SANParks) has announced that with effect from 1 September 2009, an annual rates increase will be implemented, earlier than the usual increase date of 1 November. This is due to the rapidly increasing inflation rate, experienced over the past couple of months.

SANParks sets its rates a year in advance, as per the industry norm. However, due to rapid inflationary increases an earlier adjustment has become a necessity. "We have considered many options, including an additional increase as from 1 November 2008. However, due to the fact that so many of the guests had already booked and in some cases paid for their holidays to national parks, it was decided not to implement this option, but rather to increase the fees for new bookings from 1 September 2009 (which open from 1 October 2008). Conservation fees and activity rates will also increase from 1 September 2009."

"With CPIX at 13,6% in August 2008 and average accommodation and camping rates increasing by an average of only 7,0% on 01 November 2008, we need to hike rates earlier than normal in 2009 and the accommodation and camping rates will increase by an average of 14,6% as from 01 September 2009" said Mr. Glenn Phillips, Managing Executive: Tourism and Marketing at SANParks. "This will enable us to deal with the reduced spending power and resultant increase in costs of the average basket of good and services in South Africa."

"We would like to announce though that our customers will experience some relief in that additional person rates in guest houses have now been restructured so that children will be charged at half the adult rate as from 1 November 2008. Children in guest houses were charged full additional person rates in the past and with this change, we trust that it will be easier for family groups to visit national parks" added Phillips.

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