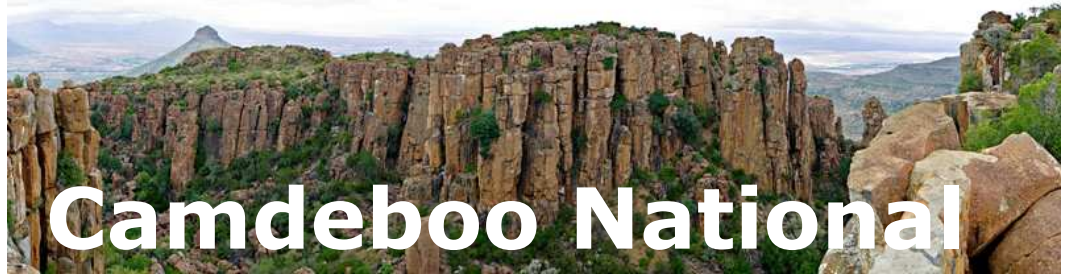




**South African
NATIONAL PARKS**



Camdeboo National Park News

Issue 1 August 2009

Welcome to Camdeboo News

Welcome to the first edition of Camdeboo Park News! This newsletter aims to keep all our valuable stakeholders and customers up-to-date on what is happening in the Camdeboo National Park.

News will be issued on a biannual basis. Please contact our Park Office if you wish to be added to the mailing list.

We hope you enjoy the news and your visits to the Park this year.

Camdeboo National Park Gate Guards Scoop Top Award

Camdeboo National Park's Gate guards were rewarded for their excellent customer service, scooping the Gate of the Year Award at the recent Frontier Region Achievement Awards which were held at the Graaff-Reinet Golf Club on 23 June.

The awards function is held annually to celebrate the achievements and excellent performance of staff members of the South African National Parks (SANParks) Frontier Region, a management region including Addo Elephant, Camdeboo, Karoo and Mountain Zebra National Parks.

The Park's four gates guards, Gcobani Blouw, Boyce Arnolds, Mzoxolo Dontsa and Siyabulela Kunene, received the award in recognition of their excellent, friendly and helpful service visitors, as well as the

excellent state in which the entrance gates to the Park are maintained.

The gate guards have frequently received compliments from both local and international visitors on the service experienced at Camdeboo entrance gates, creating a lasting positive impression of the national park.

Camdeboo National Park's administration clerk, Nozodwa Nkanunu, also received recognition at the awards function, achieving a merit award for Excellent Performance in the Workplace. Nozodwa's dedication

and commitment to service have seen her rise from cleaner to administration clerk.



(L to R) Gate guards Mzoxolo Dontsa and Gcobani Blouw, Admin clerk Nozodwa Nkanunu, Park Manager Peter Burdett and Gate guards Siyabulela Kunene and Boyce Arnolds (front)

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Buffalo Census

A recent census of the Camdeboo National Park's buffalo population was carried out using a R44 helicopter.

A total of 46 buffalo were counted in the block between the Pienaars River, the road to the viewpoint reached from junction No 1 and the dam shore in the Game Viewing Area. It was clear from the pathways and dung deposits that this buffalo herd spends

most of their time in this area.

The census is usually done in the cooler times of the year so that animals that may become stressed by the proximity of the helicopter do not suffer from additional heat stress which could have negative consequences. Serving as a member of the census team is not a job anyone can walk off the street and do successfully. The job requires a practiced

Recent ground counts by rangers in the Game Viewing Area:

Eland	79
Black wildebeest	91
Red hartebeest	98
Blesbok	107
Springbok	293
Ostrich	124

eye and ability to spot wildlife among the vegetation below. Sometimes large numbers of a particular species need to be counted within a few seconds. The particularly dense acacia and tamarisk vegetation in the area made the task particularly difficult.



Park Manager, Peter Burdett

Park Manager's Words

Following the well attended public meeting held by the Camdeboo National Park Forum on the 09th March 2009 our management team has followed up on a number of community inspired initiatives, including this newsletter aimed at communicating recent developments, current issues and future planning of our park. We hope that this newsletter will play a valuable role in future communication and relations with our stakeholders and invite interaction, through comment or contribution to the content, by the readership.

Notwithstanding a downturn in the economy visitor numbers have shown a year to date increase of 14 % over last year while the parks finances are in a favourable position of being 11.2% better than budget for the first quarter.

Park expansion plans to link the Mountain Zebra Park with the CNP have been given a boost by the SANBI initiative to improve conservation of the Grassland Biome in South Africa. The dry mountain grasslands between the two parks are being evaluated as one of two areas with the potential to fill this national conservation priority, while the local initiative will achieve concurrent goals of bio-regional planning.

An application has been made on behalf of the park for an amount of R7.0m to the Expanded Public Works Program which has been revived

by the newly elected government. This project is expected to create a large number of jobs while addressing Phase one of a program to fence the park to a standard that will meet the requirements of containing the current spectrum of species, including damage causing animals like jackal and lynx, which occurs in the park.

I hope that you will find this newsletter informative and an enjoyable read and look forward and look forward to your continued criticism, suggestions or support in future issues.

Peter Burdett

PARK MANAGER

Rare Sighting of Temminck's Courser

Shirley Grindley, a Granaat member, recently had an extremely rare sighting of a Temminck's courser.

"Roy (Stauth) and I were lucky enough to get an excellent view of one in the Game Viewing Area of the Camdeboo National Park. It obligingly stood on the edge of the road for several minutes while we admired it and confirmed its identity," said Shirley.

The Temminck's Courser is the smallest of the South Afri-

can coursers, a beautiful bird with exquisite and distinctive markings. It has a distinctive chestnut brown bib on its upper chest which grades to a patch of rich black that extends from its lower chest down to its belly. The remainder of the belly is white, as are the legs which look as though they are clothed in long white stockings. The crown is chestnut, with a

white supercilium extending from the eye to the nape. A wide black eye stripe extends below the supercilium, also meeting at the nape of the neck, where the two stripes form a neat black and white "V".

Shirley continued: "Our excitement at seeing this bird was heightened when we read in Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (V11 edition) that the

Temminck's Courser is no longer found in the Karoo. The distribution map does show a few scattered dots indicating odd sightings in the Eastern Cape, but the range of these birds has greatly contracted since 1960's. The reasons for this contraction are not understood, but in the Eastern Cape it appears to be linked to a decrease in food supply (insects), perhaps stemming from a reduction in grass or from the widespread use of pesticides."

New Gideon Scheepers Trail

A section of a new hiking trail – the Gideon Scheepers Trail – has recently been opened in the Camdeboo National Park, as part of a plan to develop the Park's trail network.

Hiking enthusiasts can now take advantage of this new trail, along with the existing trails: the Eerstefontein day walk, Driekoppe overnight trail and the short Valley Trail.

The trail starts at the Gideon Scheepers monument just out of town on the R63 to Murraysburg. Hikers climb up a densely vegetated kloof to a small open plateau with impressive views of the local landscape including the Nqweba dam. Succulent plant enthusiasts will find much to absorb them and the endangered Cape mountain zebra and kudu can often be spotted

in the area. The trail then follows the escarpment and descends past the ruins of an old 'veepos' or stock post into Babergat where it rejoins the R63. The trail forms a very convenient return route for groups who walk from town to the monument and back.

Hikers can use the Gideon Scheepers Trail free of charge without the necessity of an entry permit.

Further extension of this trail to Ribbokberg picnic site is also on the cards.



Hiking in Camdeboo National Park

“Superb” New Koedoeskloof 4x4 Trail

A “superb” and “fantastic” trail with “stunning views” and one that “adds great value to the Park” are just some of the comments received from visitors who have tried out the new Koedoeskloof 4x4 Trail. The trail follows a 7-kilometre route to the top of the mountain, providing unique and spectacular views of the landscape. The trail can be completed – with a return journey following the same track – in about three hours but the Karoo tranquillity and scenic vistas beg for a full day outing.

The turning point of the trail, which lies on top of the mountain in the Winterhoek

area of the Park, is the perfect place for a picnic lunch or tea break and a picnic table is provided here.

The trail is graded between 2 on the flatter sections and up to grade 5 on the steep, rocky sections, which means the use of a 4x4 vehicle with low range is essential. The section of the trail just before the top of the mountain is steep and should only be attempted in dry weather.

Koedoeskloof 4x4 trail can be accessed via the Valley of Desolation gate, with the turnoff to the trail well sign-posted about 3 kilometres after the turnoff to the Valley

of Desolation. No booking is necessary for those who wish to complete the trail and no fee is payable, apart from the Park conservation fee. Visitors can only attempt the trail in a 4x4 vehicle.

The first section of the trail travels through Nama Karoo vegetation where you might spot springbok, red hartebeest and blesbok. The trail then passes through thicket vegetation where kudu and baboons are common. Cape mountain zebra and grey rhebok can be seen on the final section of the trail which is vegetated with open grassland and bush clump savanna.

“The Koedoeskloof 4x4 Trail adds great value to the Park with its stunning views”

On the route, there are wonderful views of the Nqweba Dam, the plains of Camdeboo and an unusual back-angle view of the Valley of Desolation.

This new 4x4 trail provides another activity for visitors to the Camdeboo National Park, which is famous for the world-renowned Valley of Desolation, as well as opening up a new area of the Park for viewing.



Photos of the Koedoeskloof 4x4 Trail, courtesy of David Lipschitz

Blood Donor Month Rally

Twenty-three staff members of Camdeboo National Park took part in the Blood Donor Month drive with a rally on 22 June.

Nina van Wyk, an education officer from the Port Elizabeth branch of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS), visited Camdeboo National Park to deliver a presentation to the staff on the importance of donating blood.

Van Wyk also stressed the

importance of knowing your own blood group and then proceeded to perform tests in order to determine each staff member’s blood group.

Although staff were initially apprehensive about having their fingers pricked, they soon realised just how quick the procedure was and how this test could benefit them.

The most common blood groups found in the group were O+ and A+ which corresponds with the two most

common groups nationally. Three staff members were surprised to learn that they had rare blood groups: two with the AB+ group and one with the A- group.

Staff members proudly displayed their blood groups printed on stickers and went away from the rally with a new knowledge of blood groups and the importance of blood donation.



Henry Lomborg gets his finger pricked to determine his blood group

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Find us on the web

www.sanparks.org/parks/camdeboo

"The Park on Your Doorstep"

Have your say on our popular website forums
at www.sanparks.org/forums/

Find Camdeboo under "Frontier Parks" topic

Granaat: "Friends of the Park"

Granaat is a "social club" with strong conservation interests and a mission to assist the Camdeboo National Park in whatever ways may be useful. The club has approximately 90 members who meet once a month to discuss new programmes, hear a guest speaker address some topic of interest to members and – above all – "socialize". Park staff members are always most welcome to attend these gatherings.

Amongst past projects have been organised "snare hunts" in areas known to be frequented by poachers, rubbish clean-ups, investigations into various issues relating to alien vegetation, as well as reporting observations relating to the fauna and flora of the Park.

A major project undertaken in the last fiscal year was organising and conducting a series of outings for elderly people who, for various reasons, were not able to visit the Game Viewing Area

(GVA) in the Park. A 32-seater bus was kindly provided by Senior Superintendent Swartbooi, Commanding Officer of the South Africa Police Training Academy in Graaff-Reinet. A driver and assistant were also provided. The Park provided an experienced field ranger to act as a guide, as well as a Community Communications Officer, while Granaat provided a member to serve assist with coordination and care of the guests.

A total of four half-day outings were undertaken. Refreshments were provided by some of the "Old Age Homes", as well as by Hospice. Two of the outings were for Horseshoe residents of Parsonage Street Homes, Edenhof and Huis van de Graaff. The other two outings were for senior citizens (many of whom are caretakers of orphans) in Umasizakhe and Kroonvale, who had been contacted and organised by officials

of St Phillips Anglican Church and Hospice.

All four outings were hugely successful. Much game was seen, and refreshments were served at Ganalapa, the pleasant picnic site in the park. Many of the people had never before visited the park, and some had never before seen in the wild several of the species encountered.

These outings were reported in articles (well-illustrated with photographs) in the local newspaper, "The Advertiser", in which gratitude was expressed to the Park, Granaat and the Police Training Academy for undertaking this multi-programme of community outreach. These articles, along with all the word-of-mouth communications, generated much favourable publicity for the various organisations concerned – particularly for the Camdeboo National Park!

Camdeboo's Honorary Rangers

The Honorary Rangers are a group of dedicated people with a passion for nature conservation. They work as volunteers in National Parks, assisting with park duties and raising funds for projects in the parks. The Camdeboo National Park has its own group of Honorary Rangers. Although a new unit, the members are very passionate about the park and its fauna and flora.

Over the past six months, the Honorary Rangers worked closely with park management to provide visible policing in the park while on park duty. They also raised funds with a food stall at the recent Dam Day and assisted the park management to host a very successful Golf Day, and will also contribute towards a Birding Day to be held later this year.

Regular meetings are normally

combined with fun activities, such as water patrols on the Nqweba Dam, game drives or picnics. More interesting excursions are planned for the rest of the year.

Funds raised during the past six months will be used to assist the park with the establishment of a walking trail from the Gideon Scheepers Memorial to the Ribboksberg Picnic Site. The idea is to get local youth organisations like Landsdiens, the Boy Scouts, the Ekko Club and others involved in the project.

Residents of Graaff-Reinet and other towns in the region who would like to know more about the activities of the Honorary Rangers are welcome to contact the chairperson, Mollie Kruger 082 495 7550 for more information.



Honorary Rangers conduct a boat patrol on the Nqweba Dam



Honorary Ranger Murray Schmidt releases an illegally caught carp. Fishing gear left at the site on the Nqweba Dam was also confiscated