

MZNP celebrates 80 years of protecting the Cape mountain zebra

As World Ranger Day was celebrated around the globe yesterday (31 July 2017), South African National Parks (SANParks) celebrated the 80th birthday of Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNP). On 3 July 1937, MZNP was proclaimed for the purpose of protecting the Cape mountain zebra (*Equus zebra*) at which time it was estimated that fewer than 100 Cape mountain zebra were left in South Africa.



Bernard DUPONT via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The Cape mountain zebra sub-species was downlisted off the list of endangered species threatened with extinction at last year's CITES COP17. MZNP has played a principal role in conserving this previously endangered species and has translocated many Cape mountain zebra over the years to create breeding populations in other national parks and game reserves, both public and privately-owned. The park is home to the largest of the three original sub-populations in the country and the current population is now over 1,100 zebra, having grown from only 11 individuals.

The park size has increased considerably over the years, from 1,712ha at the proclamation to 28,386ha at present. In recent years, the park has re-introduced cheetah, lion, brown hyena, buffalo and black rhino to the area.

Building of rock chalets stimulates local economy

The Eastern Cape MEC for Economic Development and Environmental Affairs, Sakhumzi Somyo, speaking on behalf of the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Dr Edna Molewa, said the opening of eight new accommodation units – the Rock Chalets – increased the park's permanent employment by 20%, “not to mention the increase in casual work opportunities and extra stimulation of the local economy that will follow.”

The construction of the income-generating facilities was made possible by the government's infrastructure development programme. “This is one small example of how the Green Economy benefits our local economies that need it most. I had the privilege of being the first guest to sleep in one of these chalets and I can tell you now they are top quality accommodation,” said Somyo.

The new units comprise six two-sleeper cottages and two four-star rock chalets to complement the camping and caravan sites, four-sleeper family cottages, mountain huts and historic guesthouse. The rest camp ran at an 85% occupancy rate over the past financial year, up by nearly 5% on the previous year and this necessitated additional accommodation options.

Maintaining the landscape

The signed management plan for the Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Protected Environment was handed to the Landowners Association committee at the celebration. The Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Protected Environment was officially declared by the Minister on 1 April 2016, involving 66 landowners and spanning an area of 286,343ha.

The protected environment is situated between Graaff-Reinet, Nieu-Bethesda, Cradock and Pearston. Its purpose is to maintain the landscape in terms of its scenic, biodiversity and landscape value through collective action by the private landowners and to protect the area from detrimental developments.

Paying tribute to the game rangers

The MEC paid tribute to the game rangers around the country who have dedicated their lives to working to protect South Africa's wildlife and natural heritage. "These are the men and women on the frontline – the people who keep our precious natural resources safe. They put their lives on the line every day to keep our flora and fauna safe and on behalf of all South Africans. I want to thank each and every one of them for their dedication and passion for conservation."

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