

Crusading Algoa FM DJ highlights plight of zoo animals

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Self-confessed "new convert" to animal rights and multi award-winning Algoa FM breakfast show presenter Daron Mann, used the power of radio combined with social media to highlight the plight of animals kept in the East London Zoo.



Daron Mann

His campaign has been so effective that it has taken the issue out of the Eastern Cape to a national and even international level.

On Sunday, March 3, the zoo was the subject of a Carte Blanche investigation, with Mann filmed in Algoa FM's Port Elizabeth studios.

It was social media that first brought the conditions at the East London Zoo to Mann's attention.

"In January 2018 I saw pictures on social media of the horrific conditions under which the brown bears are being kept in a pit enclosure where all they see is bare walls. You do not have to be an animal rights activist to be moved by their eyes – they are empty and soulless," says Mann.

Jenny, a 35-year-old bear, was euthanised in October 2018 due to its poor condition.

This was after Mann and Ukraine-based bear expert Lionel de Lange put the spotlight on the condition of the bears – Jenny and her 30-year-old daughter, Gina.

"What radio has done is enable me to reach a wide audience, and to interview top experts from around the world. It is not Daron Mann or Algoa FM who are saying that the conditions at the zoo are unacceptable – it is some of the most knowledgeable people in the world".

Station management has been supportive of Mann, even though an advertiser threatened to pull out because of the campaign.

“I understand that management is walking a fine line. One advertiser laid a complaint with the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), however, the matter was withdrawn because I have been careful to stick to indisputable facts about the conditions under which the animals are incarcerated.

“Algoa FM has hired me to have an opinion, and I am free to share that opinion on air, provided I do not damage the station’s brand, the good name and reputation of others or contravene the broadcaster’s code of conduct,” he says.

“The success of Daron’s campaign is as a direct result of good multichannel promotion with a loyal audience which appreciates honesty and fact,” says Alfie Jay, Algoa FM’s operations director.

“In pursuing this issue, Daron has not only highlighted the plight of defenceless animals but has also established a closer trust relationship with his audience. I can’t think of a better example to prove the effectiveness of integrating radio and social media,” added Jay.

There were immediate spikes in social media after the interviews with experts and mentions of the zoo animals.

Social media helps drive the message home as it can provide pictures and video material to engage people for much longer on a specific issue than broadcast or print, according to Mann.

Mann is leveraging the power of his show – the Daron Mann Breakfast (DMB) – and social media to find solutions.

His campaign at present, focuses on the remaining bear, a single Cape vulture and a jaguar. A breeding programme has offered a home to the vulture and a nearby private reserve is willing to house the jaguar in a two-hectare enclosure.

There has been no response from the Buffalo City Municipality or zoo management, and Mann now has the support of attorneys, who are working pro-bono to gain access to the finances of the zoo in respect of the Promotion of Access to Information Act.

Public support is also growing.

Recently the Khoi-San community of the Eastern Cape handed over a petition to East London Mayor Xola Pakati, calling for the closure of the East London Zoo and the relocation of its animals, in particular the jaguar which is confined to a “miserable 150m square” wire cage, according to Khoi-San activist and ANC MPL Christian Martin.

“Algoa FM’s good working relationship with the Buffalo City Municipality is being maintained because Daron has been focusing on the plight of the animals and not the institution or its staff,” says Jay.

“I am not going to stop this multi-channel campaign until the animals are rehoused and conditions at the zoo improve,” he says.

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