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SANParks opens Mahala Week

TAKE ADVANTAGE: EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO SEE WHAT'S ON OTHER SIDE OF FENCES – MINISTER

➔ **Free access system aimed at inspiring people to take pride in SA's cultural heritage.**

Saturday Citizen reporter

From today until 24 September, South Africans are urged to visit a national park – and entrance is free.

“I urge you to go,” said Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Barbara Creecy.

“National Parks Week is an ideal opportunity for us to introduce the majesty and beauty of the country's national parks to the people, especially to communities who seldom get to experience and enjoy these areas of conservation, cultural heritage and biological diversity, right on their doorstep,” said Creecy.

The free access offered through the South African National Parks (SANParks) system is aimed at inspiring people to take pride in the country's cultural heritage while spending time in and with nature.

“Elderly people who have lived all their lives next to a National Park without ever seeing what is on the other side of the fence must be taken in their thousands to go



NATURE'S BEAUTY. An elephant walking on the road looking during morning safari in Kruger National Park.
Picture: iStock

and visit their neighbouring national parks,” said Creecy.

SANParks will again host pupils, pensioners, persons with disabilities and many others. In order to qualify for free entry, all South Africans are encouraged to carry their identity documents; children below the age of 16 will not be required to provide identification.

“Since the inception of the

South African National Parks Week in 2006, more than 619 290 South Africans, who may not otherwise had an opportunity to visit a national park, have participated,” said the minister.

“I am pleased to note that National Parks Week has gripped the imagination of some of our provincial conservation authorities, with the Limpopo Tourism Agency and North West Tourism

and Parks Board joining to host Mahala Week where select game reserves in the provinces are offering free access as well.

Total Energies Marketing South Africa and FNB have sponsored around R2 million to the National Parks Week.

Under the established theme Know Your National Parks – this year's SA National Parks Week campaign kicks off in the Kruger

National Park.

The world-renowned park is not only South Africa's first national park but is also the largest, spanning 19 458km².

The Kruger is the sixth-largest national park in Africa and not only boasts the iconic big five alongside a wide variety of wildlife and plants but is also home to unique landscapes and biomes.

In the past year, SANParks spent more than R550 million procuring services from small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

A total of R273 million has been spent on 863 SMMEs through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), creating more than 5 364 full-time equivalent work opportunities in communities where there is little formal employment.

Every day, an average of 7 500 individuals employed by the EPWP enter SA's national parks and do crucial work such as land rehabilitation, cleaning of beaches, support of rangers and infrastructure maintenance.

► Namaqua National Park, the Boulders Penguin Colony and the Cableway in Table Mountain National Park do not form part of the National Parks Week free access programme.
– news@citizen.co.za

► **Also see P12**