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## DIRECTORATE: CORPORATE COMMUNICATION & ICT

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### Media statement

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### A day in the park with elderly people

By: Simon Mmope

Its twelve o'clock noon. Animals assemble under trees seeking refuge from the burning sun. As they gather under the *mokgalo* tree, there's silence across the 55 000 ha national park.

This *mokgalo* tree has defied the odds by surviving the harsh cold winter season and now as it enters the spring season, it is filled with life and provides shade for animals.

This national park is by no means a Kruger, and it doesn't pretend to be. It's a lot smaller compared to South Africa's prime national park. But therein lies the magic and attraction of the malaria-free national park.

What stands out about it is, instead of driving for long hours along vast stretches of both gravel, sand and tarred road without a sighting, the park's burnt grasslands, sloped hills, and thickly wooded gorges are home to the Big Five and 30 other mammal species.

We are at the Pilanesburg National Park for the department's *Gogo-On-Tour* initiative. This is a departmental initiative that takes elderly women on a tour of one of the parks across the province during "*Mahala Week*" where access to the parks is free.

Some of the elderly women on this year's tour are rich in cultural and indigenous knowledge. They are forever relating stories to grandchildren about animal behaviour and its meaning to ordinary human being.

One of the elderly woman on tour is Mrs Joyce Thambe (76) from Mafikeng. She can relate stories and reasons behind some animal behaviour and its meanings to an ordinary human being. She is also able to tell how they behave during different seasons for survival.

The 65 elderly are from different villages across the Ngaka Modiri Molema District. For most of them it was their first time getting into a national park. Some were even looking forward to see the Big Five. Being rich in indigenous knowledge and about wild animals Thambe spoke all the way into the park about every animal they came across. It was her first time also into a National Park.

“I only got to see elephants, rhino and Leopard, three of the big five. I’m told we are very lucky to have seen a leopard because it’s very rare to most of the tourists visiting the park. I’m going to share the great experience with my grant children when I get home. I’m sure they would also want to visit one day,” she said.

She could not stop thanking the SANParks and the Department for the great opportunity and experience she acquired from the one day short Left adventure. “The great opportunity afforded to us will relieve us stress and give us experience about the beauty and the wonders we got to see inside the park. The tour of the Lost City in Sun City plus the food we had was a great treat for us. We should do this often”, said the elated Thambe.

She encouraged most of her peers to do the Shapa Roundo at least once every semester. But to her the little old age grant she gets every month pays for her insurances and food. But she says trough her little business she will continue to save for next year so that she gets to do the Short Left with other elders.

The joy and experience the elders was shared by the North West Tourism MEC Desbo Mohono. “I’m personally happy to see elders going on a short left. The experience will in a way remove most of their everyday hardships and engrave the pleasant experience in their mind. This clearly shows that Tourism cuts across all ages. It is important for locals to have an experience of their local attractions. This will make them ambassadors going forward,” said Mohono.

September has been declared by government as Tourism Month with the sole objective of focusing on the importance of tourism and encouraging locals to explore the flora and fauna and further get to experience the rich culture and traditions.

The inaugural South African National Parks Week took place in 2006 and was aimed at linking the South African national parks system to the global national movement and to also showcase the best of South Africa's national parks.

Parks to visit during the Parks Mahala Week include: **The Barberspan Bird Sanctuary, Bloemhof Dam Nature Reserve, Borakalalo National Park, Boskop Dam Nature Reserve, Botsalano Nature Reserve, Highveld Nature Reserve, Kgaswane Mountain Reserve, Mafikeng Nature Reserve, Molemane Eye Nature Reserve, Molopo Game Reserve, Pilanesberg National Park, SA Lombard Nature Reserve, Vaalkop Dam Nature Reserve and Wolwespruit Nature Reserve.**

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