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are already proclaimed are the Greater Limpopo Park between Limpopo and Zimbabwe, the Maloti-Drakensberg Park linking KwaZulu-Natal and Free State with Lesotho, and the Ais-Ais-Richtersveld Park between the Northern Cape and Namibia. Transfrontier parks enable more effective conservation efforts, and could significantly increase the ecotourism potential of the area (see Enviro Facts Protected Areas).

### Further reading

**Vision.** Annual publication of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Private Bag X11, Parkview, 2122. Tel (011) 486 1102; Fax (011) 486 1506; E-mail [ewt@ewt.org.za](mailto:ewt@ewt.org.za); Website [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za)

**Ecotourism publications and resources.** Contact Conserveonline: connecting conservation practitioners worldwide. Website <http://conserveonline.org>

### Useful addresses

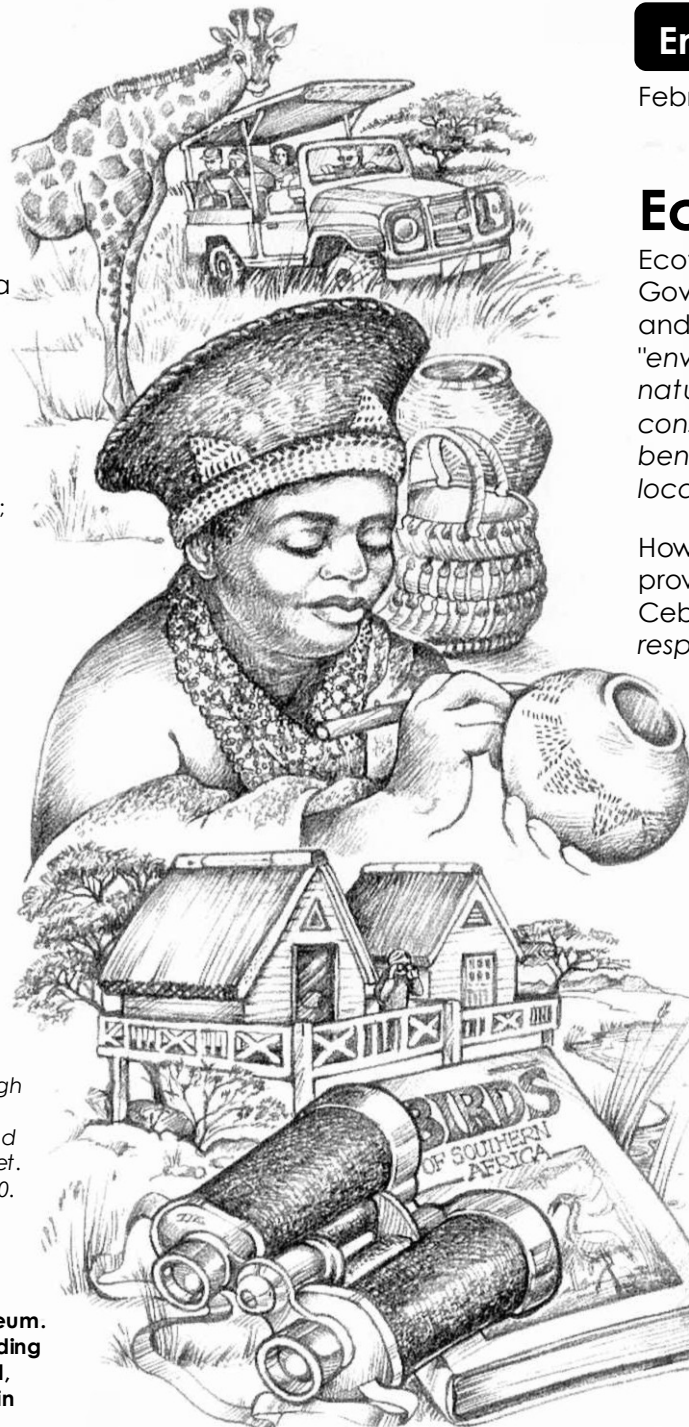
**South African National Parks.** PO Box 787, Pretoria, 0001. Tel (012) 426 500; Website [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org)

**Peace Parks Foundation.** PO Box 12743, Die Boord, Stellenbosch, 7613. Tel (021) 887 6188; E-mail [parks@ppf.org.za](mailto:parks@ppf.org.za); Website [www.peaceparks.org](http://www.peaceparks.org)



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## Enviro Facts 54

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# Ecotourism & Environment

Ecotourism is described in the South African Government's 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa as "environmentally and socially responsible travel to natural or near natural areas that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local people."

However, a more comprehensive definition has been provided by Mexican environmentalist Héctor Cebalow-Lascuráin - "Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features) that promotes conservation and sustainable development, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficial, active socio-economic involvement of local populations". This latter definition encompasses current ecotourism activities in South Africa, where communities are involved with environmental / nature / wildlife conservation as well as conservation (and showcasing) of their own local culture.

**Biodiversity:** South Africa is the third most biologically diverse country in the world. This makes it a very attractive destination for tourists, contributing to the expression 'a world in one country'. Some of the features that make South Africa attractive to tourists include a well-maintained network of protected areas, and the international recognition of our conservation practices within these protected areas. Both inside and outside of protected areas, there is a diversity of wildlife, varied and impressive scenery, unspoiled wilderness areas, and unlimited opportunities for special interest activities like hunting, bird watching and hiking.

**Threats to biodiversity:** The natural resources upon which South Africa's tourism industry depends are under threat from a range of problems, including habitat loss (mainly to agriculture, but now also under threat from climate change); soil erosion (causing dams, rivers and estuaries to silt up); commercial afforestation (timber plantations adversely affect wetlands, grasslands, fynbos, indigenous forests and river catchments); pollution (affects air, fresh water and marine ecosystems); rapid urbanization (leads to informal settlements and rising urban unemployment); and water shortages. All these reduce the leisure and aesthetic potential of South Africa to attract tourists.

## The value in rands and cents

**Tourism:** In 2006, South Africa received nearly 8,4 million tourists and tourism created 947 530 jobs. The tourism industry forms part of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa's goals to reduce poverty and unemployment; and to raise the level of economic growth by at least 4,5% in the next few years, and to an average of 6% between 2010 and 2014. Tourism's estimated contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) increased from 4,6% in 1993 to 8,3% in 2006.

**Ecotourism:** In the face of declining government funding, tourism's role in the South African economy is particularly important in the contribution of ecotourism to the management of protected areas, culturally important sites and endangered species. South African National Parks receives 17% of its total budget from government, and relies mainly on tourism for the remainder of its income. Many people view ecotourism as a significant growth industry for South Africa, and this is important for a variety of reasons. First, the money earned by tourism generates employment. Second, conservation agencies face reduced government subsidies, and look increasingly to tourism to fund their conservation work. Third, growing tourism, together with new laws that allow private ownership of game, has provided an incentive for conservation in the private sector and resulted in many successful wildlife-based tourism enterprises. There are now additional parts of South Africa's natural landscape falling under more conservation-orientated management. In addition, because of the large and lucrative hunting industry, there is more game on private land today than there was half a century ago.

## The uneasy alliance

Protected areas, with their largely unmodified landscapes, are a great attraction for tourists, and offer an opportunity for income generation which can support conservation. However, increasing numbers of tourists can overuse and degrade the very resource that is attracting

them. A way of addressing visitor impacts is to plan for areas of varying intensities of use. For example, in planning for the cableway on Table Mountain it was decided that the cableway would give access to 5% of the mountain for 95% of visitors. This requires intensive visitor management (viewpoints, concrete trails, restaurants, and toilets), but only in the area adjacent to the cableway. The remaining 95% of the mountain can be left in a relatively undeveloped state.

## Expanding stakeholder ship

In recent years development agencies and conservation authorities have recognised the importance of local communities participating in ecotourism developments. These include developments in areas adjacent to protected areas as well as in areas involving local environmental conservation projects. Local communities have become increasingly involved in the conservation and management of natural resources (inside conservation areas as well as outside of these), and in some cases, shareholders in tourism enterprises.

For example, neighbours to protected areas under the management of KZN Wildlife are given preferential employment in parks and reserves. Partnerships between KZN Wildlife and neighbouring communities involve local people in the development and operation of visitor facilities, craft markets, and indigenous nurseries for traditional healers. Of particular significance is the development of Local Conservation Boards, where KZN Wildlife staff and the relevant local stakeholders share responsibility in developing and implementing a management plan for a specific protected area.

In addition to formal links with protected areas, communities benefit from being close to areas of nature-based tourism as it puts them on mainstream tourist routes, e.g. the Golden Gate Nature Reserve in the Free State. Ecotourism can help safeguard traditional knowledge that might otherwise be lost because the commercial benefit of culture-based tourism encourages people to keep traditional knowledge alive. In addition, nature conservation ensures the survival of biological resources on which part of that traditional knowledge is based.

## Peace parks

Peace parks (also known as transfrontier parks) involve the collaboration of protected areas across an international border to form a single protected area. South Africa's first Peace Park was created in the Northern Cape by linking the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (South Africa) with the Gemsbok National Park (Botswana) to form one large protected area, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Other Peace Parks that