

## More dogs for Kruger's canine unit

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For most visitors, the deep grumble of a lion roaring or the high-pitched whooping of hyenas epitomise the nightly noises of Kruger National Park. But on my recent trip to Kruger, it wasn't these iconic sounds that woke me up in the dead of night, it was the synchronised howl of four domestic dogs.



A bloodhound/doberman cross ready for his close up.

I was privileged enough to be spending the night away from the tourist camps at Kruger's newest addition – the K9 Centre. Those four howling dogs were young bloodhound/doberman crosses, excited at the prospect of what their future working life in South Africa's premier national park holds.



The four new dogs alongside side their handlers with dog trainer Gaven Holden-Smith and kennel master Johan De Beer. Handlers' faces are blurred to protect their identity.

The dogs, now just over a year old, have been brought up as working tracking dogs and, having just finished their training at the centre, they were ready to be handed over to their respective section rangers to get to work. I was at the centre to see the great work that is being done behind the scenes to get these dogs out and working in Kruger. **The canine unit** is now a vital component in the war against poaching and these dogs join a formidable team of attack dogs, contraband detection sniffer dogs and other tracking dogs like themselves.



A handler sits alongside Kilalo – the latest addition to Kruger's canine unit. The handler's face is blurred to protect his own identity.

They had been trained by the capable Gaven Holden-Smith of Holden-Smith Tracking and Conservation and have been donated to Kruger thanks to funding from Star Project in San Francisco and Wuppertal Zooverein in Germany.

But the truth is in the world of anti-poaching it is not all cute and cuddly puppies or dramatic grenade launchers and helicopters. Sometimes it is the day to day stuff that these organisations really need. Hence why on the day of the dog handover the K9 Centre also received donations of a high pressure cleaner from Karcher, LED spot lights for the section rangers from MSC LED Lighting Solutions, alongside chains, harnesses, bite suites, mattresses, grooming brushes, transport boxes, dog bowls, materials for new kennels and Hills dog food all organised by various regions of the **SANParks Honorary Rangers**.



Members of the SANParks Honorary Rangers at the hand over ceremony.

The day also saw the handover of almost R40,000 raised through a [Facebook initiative](#) by [Safari Guide of the Year, Jaco Buys](#), and R20,000 from Bruce Fordyce at ParkRun.



Safari Guide of the Year, Jaco Buys, with Badger – a beloved tracking dog.

But perhaps the most interesting initiative that stood out for me was one pioneered by Casterbridge Animal Hospital in association with the Lowveld Region of the SANParks Honorary Rangers and the Wuppertal Zooverein. The initiative involves training each handler on basic dog first aid so they are able to care for and attend to their dog while hot on the heels of poachers. What this means is that should these four brand new additions to the canine unit be bitten by a snake, lacerate a paw or get dehydrated while deep in the bush, we can all rest easy knowing that we won't lose a dog in order to save a rhino.



Veterinary nurse, Elzabe de Bruyn, hands over the trauma kits to SANParks

Thus far, 22 trauma kits have been handed over to the handlers who have received this doggie first aid training and the K9 Centre also has their own master trauma kit. But it doesn't end there – the aim is now to compile more comprehensive kits for the section rangers, and the Honorary Rangers are even looking to buy/obtain a container which they can convert into a mobile vet clinic, complete with anesthesia machine, operating table and the like. But this all costs money, or donations kindly given from those with access to this sort of equipment. And this, my fellow puppy-lovers, is where you come in! Have a way to help? Want to donate to the K9 Centre by way of cash or equipment? Then be sure to contact Grant Coleman, chairman of the Lowveld Region of the SANParks Honorary Rangers, [via email](#) and do your part to support the canines of Kruger!



New kennels at the K9 Centre keep the dogs safe and sound at night in leopard country!