

THE PRIDE OF MKHUZE - Lions return to Mkhuze Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

History was made recently when four lions were released into Mkhuze Game Reserve after a long absence of 44 years. These big cats (a male and two females) are the first of a total of eight destined for the Mkhuze section of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. They were trans-located from Tembe Elephant Park (www.tembe.co.za) by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and its conservation partner, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. A fantastic conservation victory on the #ZuluRoute in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa - restoring this beautiful game reserve to "Big 5" status!

History was made in December 2013 when four lions were released into uMkhuze Game Reserve, following 44 years of absence from the area. The cats, which include one adult female and three sub-adult offspring (a male and two females), are the first of a total of eight lion destined for the Mkhuze section of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. They were trans-located from **Tembe Elephant Park (also located on The Zulu Route in KwaZulu-Natal)** on Saturday 2 November, a task undertaken by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and its conservation partner, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. The four lions spent the past month in a purpose-built boma in the game reserve in order to get used to their surroundings.

All adults are fitted with satellite collars which ensure accurate monitoring, essential for biological purposes and safety reasons.

Two more lionesses and two male brothers are still to be added, in a two-stage operation, to the existing four and together the eight lions will form the base of uMkhuze's new lion population.

'Today's historic and exciting introduction of lions brings iSimangaliso Wetland Park closer to achieving its conservation vision – the full restoration of eco-systems functioning and the re-establishment of the migratory patterns of historically occurring animal populations from the top of the Lebombo mountains to the sea...' commented iSimangaliso Wetland Park CEO Andrew Zaloumis at the release.

The result of 13 years' hard work, which has included settling land claims and erecting 350km of 'Big 5-proof' fencing, is the re-introduction of several thousand head of game, including oribi, tsessebe, black and white rhino, elephant, wild dog and cheetah into the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

Apart from the four lions still to be released in uMkhuze Game Reserve, the park authority's next goal is to **re-introduce eland**, scheduled to take place in April/May 2014.

'This is a great day for iSimangaliso and conservation generally, and I applaud iSimangaliso on realising our conservation vision, something I did not dream

achievable in my lifetime!' said renowned conservationist Dr Ian Player who has been highly supportive of the wetland park authority's efforts at restoring original animal populations and biodiversity to the region.

Both Ghost Mountain Inn and Tembe Elephant Park are members of the Zulu Route. To see how you can combine a stay at both of these fantastic properties as part of a larger KwaZulu-Natal itinerary please visit www.zuluroute.com or follow us on twitter on @ZuluRoute

STAY:

GHOST MOUNTAIN INN– KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa - www.ghostmountaininn.co.za

Ghost Mountain Safaris offers guided game drives, fig forest walks, birding excursions and picnics in Mkhuze Game Reserve for those wanting to visit the newest arrivals. Ghost Mountain Inn is situated at the foot of the legendary Ghost Mountain in Northern KwaZulu-Natal and is undoubtedly Zululand's finest Country Inn. This intimate 4-star family owned and run hotel boasts 50 luxurious rooms all with private patios leading on to the extensive indigenous gardens. Nature enthusiasts will appreciate the abundance of wildlife and the scenic splendours of this rich and diverse region during game drives and guided walks in reserves such as Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, Mkhuze and Ndumo in the company of knowledgeable rangers. Ghost Mountain also has its own private boat on Lake Jozini which is fantastic for birding, fishing and game viewing on the shores of the Pongola Game Reserve. Back at the hotel, unwind with a soothing Spa with steam room & plunge pool. For those travelling to southern Mozambique, or between Kruger Park, Swaziland and Durban, Ghost Mountain Inn makes an excellent stopover or memorable getaway. Once at Ghost Mountain, guests never want to leave – so we recommend at least 2, 3 (or even 4!) nights so that they can really soak up the atmosphere and enjoy the many activities on offer at the hotel, and in the surrounding area.

SOURCE: by Tamlyn Jolly in the Zululand Observer | 9 December 2013:
<http://zululandobserver.co.za/17415/history-in-the-making-at-umkhuze-game-reserve/>

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