

MEDIA RELEASE - 21 May 2002

Roan Antelope operation, response to the Citizen newspaper article

STATEMENT FROM SANPARKS ON THE ROAN OPERATION

The National SPCA is currently investigating a charge of animal cruelty, alleged to have occurred in an operation conducted by SANParks in 2001 to establish the rare roan antelope into national parks in South Africa. During the operation 106 roans were captured in Botswana. Of these 81 were successfully established in the Vaalbos and Marakele National Parks, but the operation was marred by the deaths of 30 animals. Among the mortalities were pregnant cows, that died mostly from capture and confinement related stress, and calves that were born during the time their mothers were being held in quarantine facilities.

The roan antelope is rare in South Africa, currently numbering about 1 400. The aim of the operation was to build up numbers in South Africa. Foot and mouth disease regulations make it difficult to import game from Botswana, but the lifting of restrictions last year gave a narrow 'window of opportunity' to obtain roan antelope for our national parks. SANParks decided to take the opportunity and the 81 roan established during the operation brought the total number currently maintained in national parks to at least 200. This will help to ensure the conservation status of the species in future. We are pleased to state that the newly established animals are doing well and 18 healthy calves have been born.

We admit, however, that the high mortality rate during the operation is totally unacceptable, and regret the loss of the animals that died in our care. Game capture operations need to be conducted according to the highest professional standards, and we will therefore be guided by the results of the NSPCA investigation to take whatever steps may be necessary to make sure that nothing like this happens again. We have compiled an internal report on the operation and submitted it for the consideration of our Animal Use and Care Committee (an independent committee of experts in the care and treatment of animals) and also await their conclusions and recommendations. The results of these investigations will be made public.

For more information on this release contact:

Florence Masebe
Media & PR Manager
SANParks
Tel. +27 (0)12 426 5013
Mobile +27 (0)82 560 8043
E-mail: florencem@parks-sa.co.za