

Drought and waterholes

adapted from an article by Izak Smit

It is never pleasant to see animals suffer during droughts, and there is sometimes an expectation that they should be helped during those periods and providing additional waterholes is frequently considered an obvious intervention.



In a natural situation, animals typically prefer to stay in areas where there is adequate food in close proximity to water. However, during droughts, food close to water is the first to be 34 and animals have to go further to find water. Stronger and less water-dependent creatures will be able to make the journey of increasing distance between food and water, yet some of the water-dependent species and weak ones may 35 as they cannot cover these distances. If water is too widely provided across the landscape, bringing all food within easy walking distance of water, then weak and water-dependent animals also compete for food. In the end, even the strong and less water-dependent creatures are at risk of starvation as there are no “reserve forage” areas left.

Due to these lessons learned from previous droughts, SANParks¹⁾ management started closing artificial waterholes in the Kruger National Park during the 1990s.

Still, the tourist value of waterholes is appreciated and that’s why Kruger is creating roads to natural water pools along seasonal rivers, providing viewing opportunities while also 36 sound ecological management. In order to conserve nature, we need to consider the system holistically.

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noot 1 SANParks = South African National Parks