

## Wherever there is water, however small the trickle, you are bound to find fish

**Johan de Klerk**  
Karoo National Park senior section ranger

Are there fish species in the Karoo? Definitely. Although situated in an extremely arid region, the Karoo National Park is home to a small but very real fish species. Few people will believe that any can occur in this arid area with mostly non-perennial streams and rivers, but the chubby-head barb *dikkop-ghielientjie* is very much at home in the Karoo systems and its scientific name is *Barbus anoplus*. As far as is presently known, it has penetrated into many areas of South Africa from the highveld of Limpopo to upland Natal, Eastern Cape and the upper and

middle Orange River basin which includes the arid Karoo. It is also present in the Olifants (Western Cape), Gourits, Gamtoos, Sundays and Great Fish rivers. The barb has been witnessed migrating up a mere trickle of water in the Karoo, obviously taking a chance by penetrating into very small, temporary streams.

This is one of the traits that would explain how it has come to be such a widely distributed species.

Some of the chubby-head barb were caught in the Leeu River system inside Karoo National Park and released into the fish pond at the park's interpretive and information centre, which includes the surrounding Karoo garden.



You can have a closer look at the chubby-head barb at the park's interpretive and information centre. Insert: Proof that fish do swim in the Karoo.

## Two cottages in unique surroundings



The Embizweni Cottage in the heart of the Karoo National Park.

If you are interested in taking a 4x4 trip but don't have much experience in off-road driving, why not try the Nuweveld 4x4 route in the Karoo National Park? It offers drivers the opportunity of a day- or two-day trip, sleeping in the Embizweni Cottage on the way.

The track covers approximately 80 to 90km of remote areas with only a grade-two difficulty rating.

According to [www.gentryoffroad.com](http://www.gentryoffroad.com) this means that a high-rise vehicle is preferred as you will in places, encounter shallow water crossings, grades, rocky terrain and ruts.

Only about 55km of the total distance is 4x4 track so beginners can rest assured. Drivers will be required to cross seasonal rivers and sandy areas, but the greater part of the route consists of rocky terrain.

Visitors using the overnight Embizweni Cottage must start the route no later than 14:00 while day visitors should not leave later than 11:00. These time provisions will enable guests to arrive at their destinations in the event of unplanned incidents such as rain or a flat tyre.

The self-catering cottage is fully equipped with a fridge, gas stove, braai area and solar electricity. It can accommodate up to six people in the two rooms (one has a double bed while the other is equipped with two bunk beds).

Large herds of antelope can be seen in this section of the park, including gemsbok, mountain zebra, Burchell's zebra, kudu and red hartebeest.

Birding enthusiasts can look out for Verreaux's black eagle, Kori bustards, martial eagles and others. With some luck you could also spot the lion of this park.

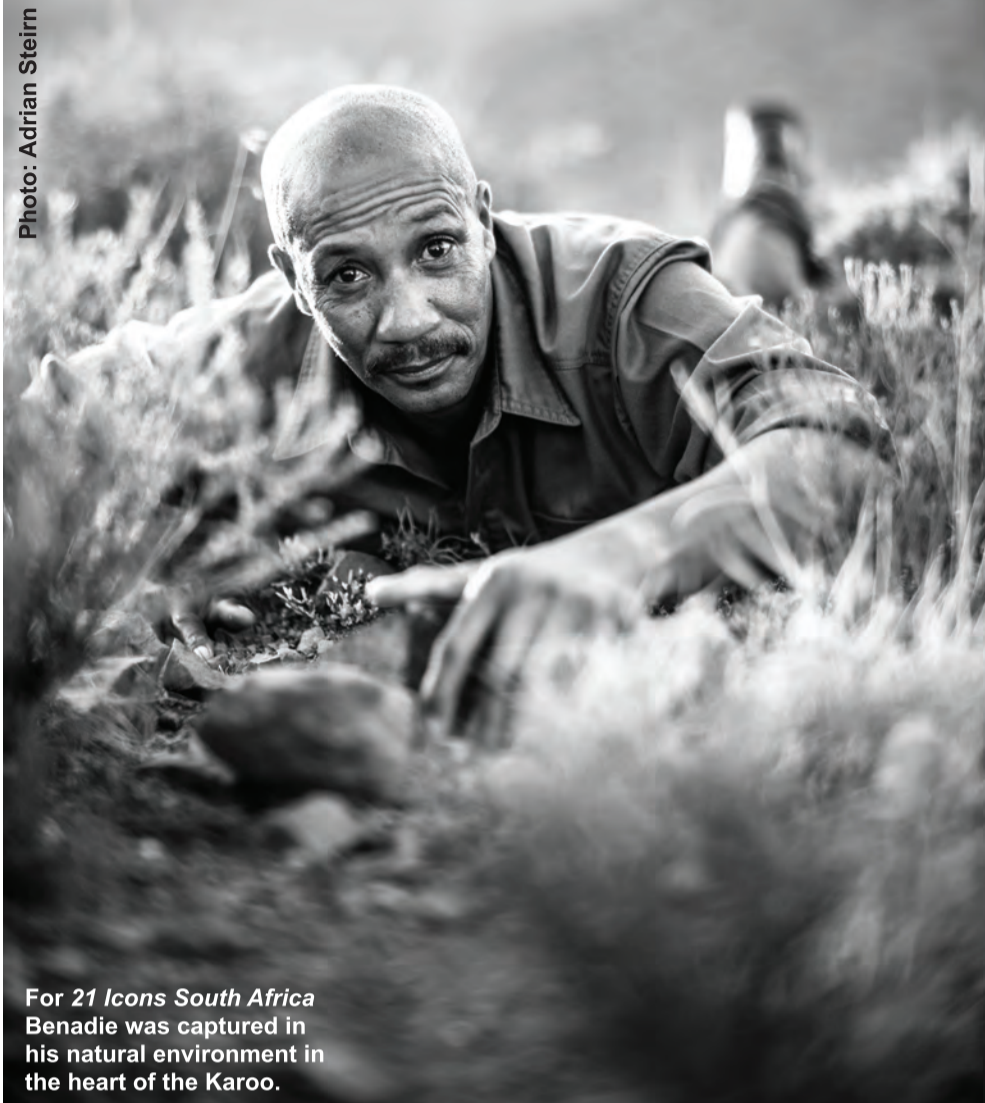


Photo: Adrian Steirn

For *21 Icons South Africa* Benadie was captured in his natural environment in the heart of the Karoo.

# Inspiring master tracker honoured

**René de Klerk**

A former Karoo National Park guide and South African master tracker's name has been etched alongside those of Nelson Mandela, former president FW de Klerk and singer Johnny Clegg.

Karel Benadie (better known as Pokkie) was honoured as one of the *21 Icons South Africa*, something very few ever accomplish.

Adrian Steirn's project, *21 Icons South Africa*, is an annual collection of photographs and short films on inspiring South Africans. The main aim is to showcase people who have inspired others through their extraordinary contributions and inspire ordinary citizens to become the leaders of tomorrow.

The 50 year-old Benadie initially didn't know what

it meant to be one of the 21 icons and didn't expect anything of this magnitude to happen. In fact, he never knew the project existed. "To get recognition for conservation is the biggest honour and makes me even prouder of what I do," he says. "My spirit feels a lot bigger now and people praise me for my work." Before, very few people outside the conservation community knew of him.

Benadie was born and raised on the farm Stolzhoeck before it was incorporated in the Karoo National Park 14 years later. He then started at SANParks as general worker. However, as he possesses some of the most-extraordinary tracking skills, he was soon promoted to ranger, researcher

and tracker. Even the older rangers learned from the youngster, and his tracking skills assisted with research on the feeding habits of the black rhino. Despite being illiterate at the time, he used a data-capture device to collect information, and became published in the scientific journal *Pachyderm*.

While trackers have a good general knowledge of animals and plants, master trackers are on a different level. In fact, there are only four in South Africa. While most of us won't last without food and water in the harsh Karoo landscape, survival is a walk in the park for this master tracker. Karoo plants may not look edible, but Benadie can even conjure up potatoes,

tomatoes and tasty fruit from this landscape, complete with herbs to add flavour. You need to know what you are doing though as some plants are poisonous, but the berries perfectly edible.

"I wanted to stay in the park for the rest of my life, but I also dreamed about sharing my knowledge with others," explains Benadie. In 2010, after 33 years of working in the park, a single phone call opened a door. Benadie's love for conservation led him to do what he always wanted - train others to be like him. Today he works at the Tracker Academy in Graaff-Reinet where he shares his precious indigenous knowledge with others.

While he spent his childhood days trapping caracals to protect livestock, he values all forms of life now. Plus today, Benadie lives his dream. He teaches future conservationists the secrets of his trade and that even includes tracking mice, millipedes and of course, spiders.

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