

Bose donates 34 headsets to South African National Parks Air Wing

By Athol Franz



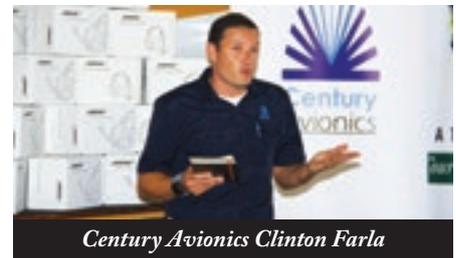
Some of the SANParks team with Century Avionics and Bose



Helicopter Pilot Jaco Mol



SANParks' pilot Jaco Mol with Bose Garmir Da Costa



Century Avionics Clinton Farla

On Monday 1 July, I flew to and from Skukuza airport on an Airlink Embraer ERJ 145 regional jet. The purpose of this trip was to attend the donation of 34 Bose A20 aviation headsets by Bose and Century Avionics to the Air Wing for use in its helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.

South African National Parks has always been at the forefront of the fight against poaching, which over the past 10 years has been prolific within the Kruger National Park. This is the reason why the majority of the SANParks' Air Wing fleet is based at Skukuza.

SANParks has four Airbus AS350 Squirrel single-engine helicopters, two of which were acquired through money donated by the Howard Buffet Foundation, three Bat Hawk light sport aircraft, a Cessna 206 and a Cessna 182. Due to the scourge of Rhino poaching the majority of SANParks' Air Wing flights are in support of anti-poaching activities, but other tasks are game counting, slinging equipment, casualty evacuation, rescuing snared animals and capturing animals which have escaped from the park.

Speaking to SANParks' officials I was delighted to learn that due to the multi pronged approach including using the dogs, the number of Rhino that were poached in 2018 was reduced from an all time high in 2016 of more than 800 to only 350. It appears that this year the various combined anti-poaching methods will continue to reduce the number of Rhino lost to under 300, which is still not acceptable.

Whilst the pilots and their crews provide a defensive approach in the suppression and prevention of poaching within the Kruger National Park, the helicopters and aircraft are always available and on standby in response to areas where poaching is suspected, as well as supporting ground forces and the special rangers' force. Where poaching activities occur and more specifically where the pursuit of suspected poachers is required, the aircraft can be employed as a means to get the ground corps and specialised canine tracking units on site fast in virtually any terrain to pursue and apprehend suspected poachers. Over the past years, the Air Wing unit and the anti-poaching units

have enjoyed major successes, where thousands of hours have been flown on anti-poaching missions, whilst numerous poachers have been caught and handed over to law enforcement authorities. More than 1200 flight hours were flown in support of anti-poaching operations during the past year, which equates to more than three flight hours per day. These support and reaction missions provide much needed close air support to forces on the ground, provide for an eye in the sky during operations and add a level of safety and security.

Often these operations culminate in contact with armed suspects and lead to their arrest. Based on an average of 500 flight hours per annum each aircraft will require an average operating budget of R4.75 million to ensure the aircraft serviceability, operational availability and safety. Based on 500 flight hours per annum each aircraft will require 90,000 litres of Jet A1 aviation fuel which equates to a total fuel expense of R1.8 million per aircraft per annum. The cost of fuel is included in the operational costs.

The headsets handed over by the Bose representative Garmir Da Costa and Century Avionics' Clinton Farla will be used to improve communication between pilots and other ranger crew members whilst in anti-poaching operations. The development of noise cancelling Bose headsets began in 1978. A prototype Bose product was used to prevent hearing loss for pilots within the noise aviation environment during the first non-stop around-the-world flight in the Rutan Voyager. Bose was the first to release active noise cancelling headsets as a consumer product. Century Avionics is based at Lanseria International Airport and is a distributor for Bose headsets.

This year Century Avionics is celebrating its 40th year in business and the company will be responsible for the maintenance of the donated headsets. According to members of the company, Century Avionics is the largest and oldest privately owned avionics' facility in southern Africa. Thank you to everyone involved in this generous donation, because this project is very close to my heart and to that of my fiancée Christine. African Pilot will be doing more with SANParks' Air Wing in the months to come. ✈