

David 'Blackhawk' Simelane appointed as SA's first black game capture pilot

South African National Parks (SANParks) has announced the appointment of Captain David Simelane as South Africa's first black game capture-rated pilot. "We are extremely proud of Simelane and his achievement. He is an inspiration to many young black aspiring pilots and we hope that his passion will inspire more people to choose this industry as their careers," said Fundisile Mketeni, SANParks CEO.



Captain David Simelane

Nicknamed 'Blackhawk', Simelane completed his game capture rating, which is an endorsement on his pilot license, with flying colours on 2 December 2020.

Game capture rating is a complex pilot endorsement rating where a helicopter pilot needs to take into consideration the environment, animals and the crew all while managing the actual helicopter itself.

Using one's passion to make a difference

Simelane has been a helicopter pilot for 16 years and has flown all over the world including Madagascar and South Sudan. "I have a passion for flying and now I get to combine that with my love for wildlife and nature. I wake up in the morning knowing that every flight I do is to make a difference in nature conservation and in people's lives."

Simelane, who started working for SANParks earlier this year, is KNP's first black helicopter pilot working under SANParks Air Services which provide aerial support for many of the departments within SANParks. He said: "Working as a pilot for SANParks is a calling, it is tough but I am in a blessed position to say that this is not a job for me, it's a passion. Couple that with the fact that I am doing it in the same park I first fell in love with wildlife 25 years ago, is just a dream come true for me."

Improving employees' expertise

Mketeni emphasised that Simelane's achievement is a reflection of SANParks' action to improve employees' expertise to address inequalities and disparities in staff profiles. SANParks is committed towards the development and implementation of access, equity, and equal employment opportunities within the organisation.

"As a world society has started to realise how important both our natural and cultural heritage is and with a passionate and educated person like Simelane at SANParks we can continue to conserve and leave future generations with the natural beauty and heritage of South Africa. Today is a proud day for SANParks and the SANParks Air Services, we salute David Simelane and wish him well as he goes onwards and upwards" concluded Mketeni.

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