



Position title:	Head of Strategic Research
Location:	Johannesburg, South Africa
Reports to:	Director Conservation Development & Assurance
Coordinates:	Cross-functional
Start date:	Ideally 1 July 2022
Duration:	Permanent

Job overview

African Parks (AP) is a non-profit organization that takes on total responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of protected areas through long-term management partnerships with African governments and local communities. Founded in the year 2000, AP currently manages 19 national parks and protected areas in 11 countries covering 14.8 million hectares, with over 3700 permanent employees.

The ultimate objective is to ensure that these protected areas are managed in a holistic way, ensuring that they are ecologically, socio-politically and financially sustainable. These three elements interact with one another and impact on each other, and therefore all three need to be considered in long-term planning and in all decision making. To achieve this desired impact of long-term sustainability, AP implements the following five key pillars of management in all the parks that it manages: i) Park Management and Infrastructure, ii) Law Enforcement, iii) Biodiversity Conservation, iv) Community Development and v) Tourism and Enterprise Development. If well implemented, these protected areas will not only contribute to improved ecosystem services, but will bring safety and stability to these regions and drive socio-economic growth.

African Parks, as an organization, is growing, and the conservation context in Africa is evolving rapidly as a result of changing political climates, security, wildlife population dynamics, climate change, dwindling natural resources, the impacts of the digital age/media etc. Even with the most experienced park management teams and the best available knowledge, there are still high levels of uncertainty around managing these areas.

To this end African Parks adopts a strategic adaptive management approach in each park, which ensures that planning is optimized, that each park is learning continually and strategically, and that performance and impact is evaluated and measured appropriately and holistically. A key requirement of this approach is strategic research.

The research function within the organization will serve two key roles:

1. **Park specific research:** Each park identifies knowledge gaps, which are articulated as specific research requirements. The research function will coordinate research in each park in conjunction with the park management team to close these knowledge gaps and improve park management decision making. This will have a strong focus on developing relationships with international and national universities/research institutions, as well as the development of local capacity with national students.

2. **Strategic research of macro conservation issues:** African Parks wants to develop a better understanding of some of the key issues affecting conservation at a macro level, e.g. what the spread of the Sahel southwards means for the conservation of protected areas, or the impact of pastoralism on the socio-ecological systems in the Sahel belt. We also want to build a strong and reputable evidence base of the impacts that well-managed protected areas have on the regions where they are located, including the value they bring to society – particularly from a socio-economic and stability perspective. The research function will work with key renowned research institutes/universities to improve our understanding of these issues as well as showcase the role these protected areas play in providing ecosystem services, safety and security and socio-economic development at regional/national/global levels.

Essential functions and responsibilities

The Head of Strategic research will:

1. Coordinate the identification and development of all research relationships/partnerships and networking with key research institutes to build relationships.
2. Oversee the administration of the development of such partnerships, ensuring that each one is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding, with preference put on relationships with institutions vs. individuals, and with a particular focus on local capacity development.
3. With regards research conducted in each park to close identified knowledge gaps: the Head of Strategic Research will support with the implementation and management of these research activities, in coordination with the park management teams, who are ultimately responsible for these research activities.
4. With regards research conducted which will showcase broader and more holistic impact of one or more protected areas: the Head of Strategic Research will be fully responsible for the identification of the strategic level issues that need research, and the management and oversight of these research studies.
5. Synthesize results and ensure that knowledge is collated, stored, distributed and integrated with the broader organization, particularly Science Support, Media and Fundraising departments.
6. Work closely with the Science Support function to ensure that learning is feeding back into the planning and conservation management processes.

Capabilities, competencies and experience needed for the job

1. French and English speaking
2. Has an established broad-based (international) academic network
3. PhD with at least one post-doc
4. A strong peer reviewed publication record
5. 15 years' experience in research field, including with socio-ecological-economic systems and/or conservation and/or protected area management issues – ideally at the interface of both environmental and social issues.

*To apply, please email your CV and a cover letter to hradmin@africanparks.org by **8 June 2022***