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The unborn fetus of the slaughtered gemsbok cow. PHOTOS PROVIDED

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POACHERS WALK 60 KM FOR GEMSBOK

Wildlife numbers are dwindling under attack

Game poachers strike anew in the Omatjette area and cattle thieves slaughter a second stud bull at a Grootfontein cattle farmer.

Elvira Hattingh

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A farmer and several farm workers in the Omatjette area had to throw in the towel this past weekend after they had been on the trail of chamois poachers for more than ten hours in vain.

The poachers are estimated to have walked at least 60 km to slaughter one chamois.

According to the farmer on whose farm it was slaughtered, they walked so far because there may be no more game left on nearby farms.

In another case, cattle thieves also slaughtered a Braunvieh stud bull, belonging to Poen Brink, in the Grootfontein area less than a week ago. This follows after cattle thieves also slaughtered one of his Brahman stud bulls shortly before.

GEMS GOAT

"They may stay away for a few weeks, but they will come again to slaughter game," Barend Janse van Rensburg from the Omatjette area told Republikein.

The thieves poached the older, pregnant gemsbok cow on Janse van Rensburg's farm early Saturday morning, with the poachers and their dogs' tracks also covering several of his neighboring farms. It was clear that the area had been hunted regularly and for a long time.

He initially responded to calls from neighboring farms that barking dogs were heard around 1:30 a.m. on Saturday.

"This is never a good sign, because it means poachers hunting on the sly," he said. He then also found remains of the gemsbok cow in the corner of his farm where it borders three other farms.

"There wasn't much left - just the lungs hanging in a bush, the chamois' head, the contents of the stomach and the fetus that was thrown under a bush," he says.

"The loss of one chamois is not only measurable by the meat, but also by the trophy value of the animal - together it is approximately N\$12,000," he said.

DESPERATE

"These people are desperate. From where they slaughtered the gemsbok on my farm to where they returned to the communal area is about 20 km in a straight line. This means that they walked at least 60 km to slaughter a chamois and carry the meat back to where they live.

"They put in a lot of effort - they were at least a whole night and day in the field, all the time hunting and then carrying the loot back."

Janse van Rensburg says this is the first time that poachers have come so far to slaughter on his farm.

"I'm sure it's because there is no more game on the other farms. Many of the farmers who are closer to the communal area go to great expense to keep the thieves off their land.

"So they are then forced to other farms. It is not only the loss of wildlife that is heartbreaking, but a lot of money is spent on security and safety on farms. The community also sacrifices a lot of their time when there is such an incident.

"In the case of the gemsbok, we drove after the thieves with three vehicles and 14 workers," he said.

NUMBERS Dwindling

Janse van Rensburg says that in their area there is a fraction of the wildlife left compared to 15 years ago.

"I shudder to think what it will be like 15 years from now. There will be no game left. It is very sad because the wildlife is a heritage for all of us and a tourist attraction," he said.

"However, it is a belt under the heart to know that there is always help and cooperation from the community in which I find myself. Even our working people who help try to catch these crooks are affected by theft themselves. Many of their own livestock are stolen in the communal areas.

"If these poachers are not caught and given heavy sentences, this will never end. The scope of livestock and especially wildlife theft is spreading ever wider," said Janse van Rensburg.

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