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NEWS

## World famous game reserve suffers no Covid-19 poaching casualties (South Africa)

🕒 30TH JUN 2020



By IPP Media



One of the world's most famous game reserves, Thula Thula in South Africa, has survived the Covid-19 pandemic without any loss of wild animal to poaching. Francoise Malby-Anthony, who runs the game reserve said that she kept on all her anti-poaching staff throughout covid which prevented any animals being killed by poachers.

"There has been an increase in poaching as the game reserve was quiet during the lockdown. Without guests meant no safaris keeping movement inside the game reserve, so poachers could intrude more easily.

"Chasing poachers, who are the biggest threat to our game reserve, was the biggest task we faced during covid. No animal was killed or taken by poachers, but one poacher was shot dead. "We used to lose about 40 animals a year. It has gone down to less than 10 a year thanks to our top security and anti-poaching team who patrol 24/7, plus our special rhino monitoring 24/7. We also have 64 cameras all around the buildings and inside the game reserve, plus access to helicopter in case of a poaching alert.

"We have 20 security staff who rotate day and night security. The cameras inside the game reserve are being moved every two weeks. We put them in trees. Some get destroyed by our darling elephants who do not like to see foreign objects in their trees.

"We had a solution which was to put some chilli paste around the cameras, as elephants do not like spices, which saved a few of our cameras.

"Our reserve includes 29 elephants and four rhinos. All are special and protected. When you see the list of endangered species growing all the time, giraffes, hippos and many others are not on this list yet. "Three months without guests to our park has meant no income, so when you have a team of 60 employees and an anti-poaching team to take care of financially, it is challenging.

"I made a point of keeping all staff on full salary for the three months of lockdown. But for July and August I have just asked staff to reduce their salaries by 30 percent. A return to business has just started very slowly. "It is going to take a long time to recover financially. We are lucky to have a lot of clients locally in South Africa, but we all rely on foreign visitors. They are booking again, but for next year.



“We all hope international flights will be allowed by early September. Virgin has planned to start flights to Johannesburg from September 15 and we are hoping that Emirates will be allowed in earlier.

“I had a New Zealand photographic student who was a guest once and I invited him to stay for two weeks to take photos. We also have a lot of fans in New Zealand and they are so kind and caring and donate to our work via the South African conservation fund which is the non-profit organisation of Thula Thula.

“I actually have a fundraising campaign with adoption of our animals such as elephants, rhinos and hippos but also our very popular game rangers.”

More than 350 species of birdlife has been identified, including a breeding population of whitebacked vulture. A new baby covid lockdown rhino Sissi was born at the end of March to add new life to the reserve. Thula Thula was the home of late bestselling author, conservationist and Francoise's husband Lawrence Anthony, who died in 2012. His book *The Elephant Whisperer* relates the story of the rescue of the Thula Thula elephant and the special relationship he created with the herd. Francoise has carried on the legacy of her late husband with the conservation projects and running two lodges.

In 2018 she wrote the sequel to *The Elephant Whisperer*, *An Elephant in My Kitchen*, the true story and numerous adventures of the reality of running Thula Thula, after Lawrence passed away.

Thula Thula's 4500ha reserve is situated in the heart of Zululand, home to a wide variety of animals including African elephant, buffalo, white rhino, leopard, giraffe, zebra, nyala, hyena, crocodile, kudu and wildebeest as well as other indigenous species. More than 350 species of birdlife have been identified, including a breeding population of white-backed vulture.

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