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Picture: Armand Hough/African News Agency(ANA)

## KZN wildlife under siege from illegal hunters

By Karen Singh  3h ago



Durban - KwaZulu-Natal wildlife is "under attack" by illegal hunters across the province says Blessed Gwala, the IFP spokesperson for community safety and liaison.

The Mercury has seen pictures of some of the illegally killed wildlife which include cheetahs and southern reedbucks, among others.

Last week the carcasses of four dehorned rhinos were found in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

Gwala, who is also a member of the provincial Legislature, said wild animals are being “mercilessly” killed in wildlife conservation areas, in the forests of Nkandla, Qhudeneni, Ngotshe, Amatikulu and other surrounding areas.

He said these animals are under attack for consumption and for the sale of their skins and hides.

“It is alleged that these criminals breed particular types of dogs in order to carry out their operations,” said Gwala.

The reckless behaviour of organised, unsupervised hunting could lead to the extinction of endangered species, he said.

“The IFP is firmly against the unlawful and unsupervised hunting of wild animals,” said Gwala.

Gwala also alleged that the people behind these illegal operations were intimidating Ezemvelo Wildlife guards.

He said there have also been allegations that police officers are involved in these illegal activities.

“We call upon the law to intervene and to bring the perpetrators to book – regardless of their status in the community,” said Gwala.

Gwala also appealed to the local leaders to work cooperatively with police to end these illegal activities.

DA KZN Spokesperson on Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (EDTEA), Heinz de Boer, said this was a huge problem, not only in KZN but across the country and has been ongoing for decades.

De Boer said the issue worsened during the lockdown due to the impact of the economic crisis.

“We have seen a massive increase particularly during lockdown of not just protected areas and not just conservancy areas, but also private farmland, that has been completely invaded by the so-called hunters,” he said.

De Boer said in terms of the current wildlife regulations, only retriever dogs are allowed to be used while shooting game birds.

He added that landowners by law are allowed to shoot uncontrolled hunting dogs which are pursuing game on private property or game parks.

However, destroying these hunting dogs creates problems between the landowners and local communities, he said

De Boer said in some instances farmers are attacked or intimidated and their crops burnt.

“I’ve had reports of farmers in the Midlands being threatened at gunpoint by some of these poachers who insist it is a cultural practice and that they can poach wherever they want,” he said.

He said a multidisciplinary approach is needed to assist rangers who are already short-staffed.

“There’s no more control and even in our game parks ... the fences are not adequate and people are gaining access.”

De Boer said he would be meeting with the newly appointed EDTEA MEC Ravi Pillay to tackle this issue.

“It needs a multidisciplinary task team including Ezemvelo, SAPS, state security, conservation organisations and crime intelligence among others,” he said.

He said investigations must be conducted into syndicates and the supply and demand for these animals.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife confirmed that there has been an increase of illegal hunting both inside and outside of the protected areas in public and private game reserves.

Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo said this increase had been noted in public.

“The increase was first noticed during the lockdown period where people were hunting for pot,” he said.

Ezemvelo appealed for those involved in any kind of illegal hunting to cease their activities.

Nature Conservation Ordinance No. 15 of 1974 (42:2) states: “If any person hunts or captures game on land on which he is trespassing, or if any person trespasses upon any land on which game is or is likely to be found with any weapon or trap in his possession, or accompanied by any dog, he shall be guilty of an offence.”

Mntambo said the sentence for the contravention of this law is up to one-year direct imprisonment, and R5000 fine or to both.

He said Ezemvelo staff would continue to enforce the law without fear or favour.

“Intimidation of law enforcement personnel is normal, but it does not result in Ezemvelo staff failing to implement the applicable laws when they are broken,” said Mntambo.

Ezemvelo urged the public to report any planned hunting to their nearest police station or any Ezemvelo Game Reserve.

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