

• Border Security

# Wildlife vet says it's rhino "murder" not poaching

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Dave Cooper and support team in action. Picture: Wildlife Vet's Facebook.

Rhino poaching in South Africa is at a critical level despite a “deafening” silence from official government communications and mainstream media, one of southern Africa’s most dedicated and respected wildlife vets Dr Dave Cooper maintains.

Referring to the violent killing of rhino as “murders” rather than the mild, mundane “poaching”, he issued a massive cry for action before it’s too late, begging the world to wake up, see and stop what is happening in South Africa, according to Rhino Review.

His plea comes days after witnessing possibly the “worst day yet of my 40 years as a veterinarian” with the last 27 spent working with African wildlife, particularly rhino.

Cooper has dealt with numerous horrific poaching scenes over the past decade – “more than 600 post mortem examinations and crime scenes of murdered rhino”.

Writing on his Facebook page “Wild Vet” Dr Cooper says: “I thought I’d seen the worst. But no. (In December), I came face to face with the ultimate in horrific, brutal cruelty – I dare not describe it in detail for fear of being shut down by Facebook, but believe me, it was shockingly awful!”

It was so awful he said it forced him to speak up after months of silence and “deliberately only reporting positive news in an attempt to ward off the constant negative narrative”.

“We who work with rhino in particular, realise so little was said about rhino poaching in the past 18 months that people might quite legitimately believe the situation has improved, that the crisis has passed and there are more important issues to focus on – pandemics will do that to a society. It’s time to correct that false impression. Rhino poaching is at a critical level.”

According to Cooper, a much-circulated recent count of 23 rhinos poached in a 36 hour period countrywide caused some people to sit up and take notice. As did a gruesome video of a badly mutilated rhino shot by poachers in the Kruger National, that had to be humanely euthanised.

“It’s not news to us on the ground. Poaching has been rising steadily for months, while the silence from official government communications and mainstream media is deafening.

“After ten days solid of death and destruction – some days two dead rhino became four as we discovered corpse after corpse – culminating in Tuesday’s hideous experience, I believe we have to let the world know the war is as vicious as it ever was.”

“I’m exhausted, I’m furious, I’m devastated. PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is a real consequence in this career and I’ve seen the fallout in too many good people. Some days – most – I want to scream it out for everyone to wake up and acknowledge what’s really going on. Somebody needs to do a whole lot more to rein this slaughter in.

“But who is that somebody? All of us, that’s who! Our rhino are dying in numbers. Years ago, under the former Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa, the catchy slogan was ‘Not on our watch’. But guess what? It is happening on our watch!

“Vets, rangers, managers and frontline personnel are sick to the core of dealing with cruelty, brutality and the greed-fuelled destruction of our wildlife that continues unabated and unpunished,” Cooper said.