

SOUTH AFRICA

Elephants to be relocated from KZN reserve to stem poaching 'slaughter'

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An elephant allegedly killed inside the Pongola Nature Reserve.

Image: Supplied

Pongola Game Reserve East (PGRE) in KwaZulu-Natal will move about 69 elephants back onto its property to other protected areas to stem a bloody poaching war.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife said they will engage the game reserve to relocate them as soon as protected areas with adequate carrying capacity for elephants have been identified.

This was an attempt to resolve the long-standing human/wildlife conflict caused by elephants from the private game reserve and has contributed to the rise in elephant poaching incidents.

Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo said the elephants first started roaming out of the reserve to Pongola Nature Reserve (PNR) in about 2015 when the Pongola River dried up.

The PGRE is a private game reserve authorised in 1997 to introduce elephants by the then-Natal Parks Board.

By November 2016, the PGRE-owned elephants had found their way to the eastern shore section of the PNR, where they have been increasing in numbers over the years, destroying the PNR biodiversity and causing conflict with community members using that area.

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“Over the past few years, discussions aimed at finding an amicable resolution to this problem that would have resulted in the PGRE catching and relocating these elephants back to their property have failed. To date, there has been some reluctance by the PGRE to relocate the elephants to their facility,” said Mntambo.

After discussions with NGOs, including Conservation Solutions and the Aspinall Foundation, they will engage the reserve about moving the elephants.

Mntambo said the first batch will probably be relocated in March or April, should new protected areas be secured.

It may take more than a year to translocate them outside South Africa if no suitable space is available within the country, he added.

“The two NGOs have committed to funding the translocation and sharing their expertise and resources. Both organisations have committed to doing an elephant count next week and checking if crime scenes might still need to be identified.”

**I appeal to protected areas with extra space for elephants to contact us.
We will donate the elephants**

Siphesihle Mkhize, Ezemvelo acting CEO

Ezemvelo acting CEO Siphesihle Mkhize said elephants are a problem not only in KZN but in South Africa and there is not enough land to keep them.

The sooner the land issue for elephants is addressed, the better, as they are animals that cause human/wildlife conflict, said Mkhize.

“I also appeal to protected areas with extra space for elephants to contact us. We will donate the elephants. We have secured funding from our partners who have committed to paying for the translocation to any protected area inside or outside South Africa,” he said.

After a media report alleging the slaughter of elephants at the PNR, Ezemvelo said they are aware of five crime scenes being investigated, including a young elephant snared in Eswatini. Six elephants have been killed in the past six months.

Ezemvelo added it has engaged the local community through its traditional authority and various stakeholders to discuss the human/wildlife conflict.

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