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5 minute read

11 Sep 2023

01:52 pm

Elephant shot eight times during ‘unlawful’ hunt at Limpopo game reserve

Court interdict prohibits the hunting of elephants in South Africa.



An elephant at the Kruger National Park near Punda Maria in Limpopo on 25 January 2021. Picture: Jacques Nelles

A male [elephant](#) was shot eight times during a trophy hunt before eventually succumbing to its injuries on 3 September 2023.

Humane Society International is now looking at the legal options it can pursue. The animal welfare group said the issuing of the permit by Limpopo to [hunt](#) the animal was unlawful because of an court interdict in place.

“The elephant suffered through eight gunshots over an extended period of time before finally succumbing to his injuries. This tragic episode contradicts the prevailing High Court interim interdict,” said the society.

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The Western Cape High Court [interdict](#) was issued after a successful legal challenge brought by Humane Society International/Africa in 2022 against the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and others. The interdict prohibits the allocation of permits for trophy hunting of African elephants, leopard and black rhino in South Africa.

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Elephant tried to escape

The elephant was killed at the Maseke Game Reserve, situated within the Balule Nature Reserve, by a hunting party consisting of a client, a hunting guide, a reserve representative and a backup rifleman. According to a publicly released [letter](#) issued by Balule Nature Reserve, the client discharged the initial gunshot, wounding the elephant.

“The reserve representative and the hunting guide fired subsequent shots to bring the elephant down, however these efforts also proved ineffective. The injured elephant sought to escape into the neighbouring Grietjie Game Reserve, an ecotourism reserve, where trophy hunting is prohibited. The injured animal was followed on foot and a helicopter was called to the scene,” said Humane Society International.

“The elephant was eventually located and was chased back into Maseke Game Reserve by the helicopter where he was finally killed by more gunfire.”

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‘Trophy hunting profoundly inhumane’

Tony Gerrans, executive director for Humane Society International/Africa said: “We are horrified by this unnecessary tragedy. Given the High Court’s interdict prohibiting the permitting of elephant hunts, the letter’s conclusion that this hunt was lawful is incorrect. Furthermore, no animal should ever experience the pain and suffering that this elephant endured.

“The practice of trophy hunting is not only profoundly inhumane, but also poses a grave threat to our biodiversity and tarnishes South Africa’s global reputation as a sustainable and responsible tourist destination. To injure, chase and kill any animal in this way, is unacceptable.”

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Balule Nature Reserve is a member of the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR), a group of privately owned nature reserves bordering Kruger National Park. Animals can move freely across the borders of neighbouring reserves. Within the APNR, some reserves allow trophy hunting and others do not, which means that protected animals from one reserve, or even the Kruger National Park, could possibly be killed by trophy hunters within another reserve.

‘Hunting not an exact science’

Ian Nowak, the general manager for Balule Nature Reserve, insisted in an open letter that the hunt was legal.

He said the Greater Kruger Hunting protocol, which was developed by the GLTFCA Reserves and the SANParks head of sustainable use, states: “If the animal does not immediately fall to the initial brain shot the professional hunter and reserve representative shall both immediately put in a heart/ lung shot and then while the wounded elephant is still visible shall continue to fire further back-up shots, either lung, brain or disabling shots, as is most suitable.”

He added that an aircraft may be used to locate the wounded animal if other ground based efforts have failed.

Nowak said the Maseke Reserve representative conducted the hunt in accordance with the requirements and protocols.

“Hunting is never an exact science and no matter how many targets a client shoots at before the hunt, there is never any guarantee that he will make the perfect shot.

“There was a range of shots fired while the animal was visible (we understand five shots) and then three at the end after the elephant had been driven into Maseke,” he said.

‘Blood sport’

Gerrans added that hunting animals is a blood sport.

“This incident once again demonstrates the inhumanity of hunting sentient animals merely for bragging rights and to display parts of their bodies as trophies on a wall. Too many endangered and threatened animals continue to suffer and die within so-called ‘nature conservation reserves’ in what is best described as a blood sport,” Gerrans said.

“HSI/Africa has challenged the way this horrifying activity is permitted by the government, and we call on all South African wildlife administrators to abide by the High Court order which prohibits the permitting of elephant, leopard and black rhino hunts until such time as the court can rule on the merits of the permitting process.”

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