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Kruger National Park scrambles to minimise snaring of animals by villagers for game meat

Jacques Malan searching and removing snares at Kruger National Park. Picture: Thobile Mathonsi/African News Agency (ANA)

Published 9h ago

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Pretoria - In spite of the surge in snaring of animals in the Kruger National Park officials are scrambling to come up with ways to curb the emerging onslaught to the game for bush meat.

With less than two months left until the end of the year field and honorary rangers claim to have removed more than 3 000 snares that were placed across the park to trap the animals.

According to the statistics, this ruthless form of poaching has been on the increase in recent years claiming more than 7 000 snares in last year as opposed to 4 000 in 2021.

According to SA National Parks (SANParks) spokesperson Ike Phaahla, the most affected parts are the boundaries of the park and its villages.

The snares come in the form of a wire that is shaped into a noose and placed where animals usually pass in the world-renowned tourist attraction.

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The animals then trigger the cord which traps them on the neck or foot and tightens further as the animal tries to get free of it.

Phaahla said there had been an increase in demand for bush meat when before communities would hunt these animals for their families' sustenance.

During a snare-removal activity near the Pretoriuskop rest camp, where the Pretoria News took part in a media tour, more than 60 snares were removed from trees in a 6km radius.

The area inside the park borders villages Mahushu, Nyongani and Shabalala, which explained the amount of snares that were found on a daily basis in the area, said a sectional ranger who goes only by the name of "Ranger" to conceal his identity so that the communities don't target him.

"Today we have removed 64 snares, tomorrow if we come back to the same area we will probably remove the same number of snares because the villagers that put up these snares come over in night or in the morning to put them on pathways of animals ... the reason why we are removing so many snares is because this section is closer to the boundary of the villages around here which caters for easy access for people to come in.

"So when we were removing these snares the villagers that put up these snares were probably watching us from their villages and pulled back to come back another time.

"If we come back here tomorrow we will probably find double the number of snares we found today because they were not able to work today," Ranger said.

He said the project was mostly successful with the help of honorary rangers who came into the park twice a month to help them remove some of the snares.

"We were busy collecting snares with the assistance of honorary rangers who are volunteers who come here twice a month to assist us in removing the snares ...

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"In a day we normally remove more than 60 snares and that number could go up to 300 depending on how much area we are covering ...so thanks to the honorary rangers for their assistance" he said.

Ranger confirmed that the poachers coming from the communities around the area did the deed to sell the meat.

"They target impala, kudu and buffalo with different types of snares.

"This is for commercial use because they are now selling the meat to communities ...t he one that we arrested told us that they already had a buyer at a funeral that is due to take place," he said.

Head honorary ranger Jacques Malan said taht he and his team volunteered for the "love of nature".

"There are about 600 honorary rangers that do this duty ... but in the whole country we have over 4 000 rangers across South Africa in different SANParks. So there are honorary rangers at Table Mountain, etc.

"We have people coming from Johannesburg, the East Rand to assist us ...

“Normally about six to 30 volunteers on a weekend and we make small groups of six so we can sweep the whole area looking for snares,” he said.

He added that the job was dangerous but in the eight years he had been removing snares he had no serious encounters because they were always with the field rangers.

Pretoria News