

Criminal threat to KZN reserves



Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife says there has been a decrease in rhino poaching since their dehorning programme was implemented. File image

Durban — Criminals continue to be a major problem for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife game reserves, according to Ezemvelo communications manager Musa Mntambo, who said poachers were breaking fences to catch bush meat, and criminals in neighbouring areas were stealing fence materials and poles.

Conservation was given an added boost by Zulu King Misuzulu, who called on traditional leaders to take decisive action against those who endangered the natural heritage. Mntambo said they had engaged with community leaders to address the problems, but this did not always yield good results.

He said smart fencing installed in certain areas of Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park alerted them to those attempting to encroach, but the cost of this type of fencing was too high to extend it around the whole park.

Mntambo said the R40 million allocated by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and R11m from the Department of Economic Development and Tourism had helped, and the rhino dehorning programme had contributed to a decrease in poaching of these animals. The programme began in April, particularly within Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, after the province lost 325 rhinos, 307 of them from the park.

Ezemvelo CEO Dr Bandile Mkhize said since the dehorning, the number of monthly rhino poaching incidents dropped from 30 to 40 to about five in May, June and July.

He said other interventions included:

- Increasing field ranger deployment to enhance surveillance and protection efforts.
- Employing people from local communities to patrol the perimeter fences daily, identifying and repairing potential breaches.

- Installing vehicle trackers on all Ezemvelo vehicles to improve monitoring and rapid response capabilities.

Earlier this week, King Misuzulu issued a stern warning to criminals and said their actions not only undermined the integrity of the historic game reserves like Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, that used to be King Shaka's hunting ground, but posed significant danger to innocent people living adjacent to the game reserve.

“As the custodians of this rich heritage, it is our collective responsibility to preserve and protect these natural treasures. The game reserves are not merely stretches of land, but the pride of the Zulu nation, a legacy bestowed upon us by our ancestors,” he said.

The king asked all traditional leaders to take decisive action against those who vandalised or destroyed the precious infrastructure managed by Ezemvelo.

He said history was adorned with stories of how “our forebears lived in harmony with the wildlife that graces our land”, adding: “I appeal to all of you to honour this legacy by working collaboratively with the management of these game reserves.

“Let us ensure that these sanctuaries remain safe and secure, fostering an environment where humans and wildlife can thrive in mutual respect and coexistence.”

He added that this would also ensure that future generations would inherit the same pride and natural beauty.

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