

# Pack dog tracking gives anti-poaching effort the edge

**The K9 unit working in the Kruger National Park has adapted its game plan over the years with several new game changers that have made all the difference.**



*The new game changer pack of hounds for the K9 unit in the Kruger National Park were trained from an early age at the South African Wildlife College on how to track people, breaking the normal tracking instinct of tracking and hunting animals.*

The South African National Parks K9 unit strategy to include a pack of hounds with origins in America in its anti-poaching effort in the Kruger National Park is paying off.

The dog deployers and trainers of these hounds agree this has been a game-changer.



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*The formidable new pack hounds are powerful new weapons in the K9 unit's poaching arsenal.*

**Head of the unit Sam Madalane said the Malinois dog breed had helped the anti-poaching team's up its game to a 40% arrest rate a few years ago.**

He said when the cross Bloodhound-Dobermann dogs, with the ability to follow cold tracks and for longer distances, were then introduced as anti-poaching dogs, the arrest percentage rose to 85%.

He said since the superfast hounds that work in a pack during anti-poaching operations were introduced, the success rate is 95%.

He said these dogs are a cross between English foxhounds and American bluetick coonhounds.

Due to their remarkable tracking and ability to cover vast distances at high speed, they can work without a handler.

The dogs are trained to track in a pack, unlike some breeds more suited to solitary tracking with a single handler.

Another development is yet to come.





*Ranger Alan Xhosa with his Malinois anti-poaching dog, Wakita.*

**The first K9 unit dog that can smell a track by sniffing the air while on a quadbike, has just been certified and will soon be deployed to work in the park soon.**

This was the idea of now-retired section ranger, Marius Ranke.

Madalane is proud of all these achievements.

“Time and distance are the two worst enemies we face in anti-poaching. The pack of hounds with their special abilities close the deal for us,” he said.

But it is not only the pack he is proud of. He said one of the Dobermann members of the unit had outshone two dog handlers.

*“We’ve had one dog track and trace a poacher for three days over 125km. After the first day, the first handler gave up. It was too much for him to keep going. After the second day the second handler gave up, but the dog still proceeded on the third,” said Madalane.*

“These anti-poaching dogs have been very successful. We also have multiskilled dogs. Some of these are for detecting wildlife products poached from elephant, rhino and lions. These dogs are also randomly deployed at airports,” said Madalane.

He is proud of the unit's co-operation with the South African Wildlife College.

One of the college's dog deployers and pack of hounds trainers, Simon Mnisi, regularly joins the anti-poaching team.

**Mnisi said putting hounds together in a pack to run and track, is no mean feat because for the animals it's all a competition.**

*"Every hound wants to be the one to get a sniff of the track first and will break the news howling away to the other dogs, saying 'I've got the track faster than you guys!' Then they all open up and start howling. That is how they communicate to say: 'Guys we're on track and let's keep on going'," said Mnisi.*

He said the reason the pack is put to work, is to close the gap on the poachers.

*"It is about saving time. Once you put these hounds on that track that the Malinois or Bloodhounds found, they close that gap between the anti-poaching team and the poachers within a few minutes."*

**He said the hounds are often taken to the start of their tracking by helicopter, a ride they adore.**

*Mnisi said: "These hounds smile and howl every time they hear the helicopter a mile away. Once we put them in the helicopter, and we take off, they take their position. Once the helicopter starts going down to the spot where they need to get off, they all start howling because they know what's going to happen. Then it is just chaos in the helicopter because they want to work the veld."*

**– Click [here](#) to first view Sam Madalane telling more about the K9-unit and then to hear from Simon Mnisi, dog deployer and trainer, explaining how the pack of hounds do their job.**

Precious Malapane has been deploying and training the pack of hounds for the college since 2018 with Mnisi.

She said when the puppies bred in South Africa from American parents and selected for training, she slept with them.



*Precious Malapane with the pack of hounds used for anti-poaching.*

These include a Redbone coonhound, as well as an American bluetick coonhound.

“It brings joy and a smile to me to see that a dog that I raised is operational today and doing the kind of job that they have been trained to do,” said Malapane.

“We’ve got no problem with them. They adapted very well to our heat. They are very fit.”

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