

Poachers tell all: Shocking truth behind snaring of wild animals in Kruger National Park

The big cats are poached for their hides, organs and bones, while the other animals are hunted for their meat.



Kruger spokesperson Isaac Phaahla.

Snaring in the Kruger National Park has spiked dramatically and poachers are profiting from the growing demand of bush meat.

The laying of snares to trap wild animals whose meat is used not only to eat, but also by sangomas as muthi, has become a huge concern. Rangers and honorary rangers have their hands full in finding and removing these snares.

Skukuza section ranger, Kally Ubisi, told of a recent incident in which a pregnant giraffe was found with a snare around her neck. While this animal was saved, most others are not so fortunate.

A new problem has now reared its ugly head. Villagers are building their homes right next to the Kruger's fence. This allows those who lay the snares to easily enter and exit the park under the cloak of darkness. It has also come to rangers' attention that the bush meat market is now so entrenched in the area that machine-made snares are laid. Also, some villagers cut the park's fences to supply wire to make the snares, and to allow the wild animals to walk into the residential areas where they are subsequently killed for their meat.

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Big cats hunted for muthi

A traditional healer in the Bushbuckridge area who specialises in poaching big cats and selling the skins and organs, shared some insights with Lowvelder, on condition of anonymity.

He claimed he uses the organs, hides, teeth and bones for muthi. He also sells them to other traditional healers. Adult big cats are in great demand while juveniles are not preferred. However, juveniles that do fall do not go to waste. Their skins, livers, teeth and bones are still sold.



One of the impalas that was poached for its meat in the Kruger. > Photo: Supplied

“I hunt lions, leopards and cheetahs for their skins and organs. The majority of my customers are from beyond our borders. They mostly buy whole carcasses. On the other hand, local people tend to buy organs, hides and body parts, mostly for different types of muthi. I am not sure what the other traditional healers outside South Africa do with the meat. I only care about the money they pay me,” the sangoma said.

He said he sells a cat for about R2 000, depending on the size of the animal. “I use snares to catch them, but I must also carry a gun with me in case they decide to retaliate. It takes a week or two to catch one of them since they are very clever. Once the animal has been killed it takes a day or two to cut the meat,” he explained.

He described how some of his customers eat lion livers because they believe it keeps them safe in dangerous situations and when committing criminal acts. Others even use it to make them fearless at work or in business.

Lion phlegm is highly desirable among people in positions of power, be it in politics, business or in the music industry. “It helps them to be heard when they speak or sing and strikes fear in the hearts of their opponents.”

The lion's head is popular among people who want to be leaders, especially in the church or politics, as well as among polygamous men. Leopards are poached almost exclusively for their attractive skins, while cheetahs are desired by those who wish for a speedy escape from danger.

A number of traditional leaders admitted to Lowvelder they use poached big cats for purposes similar to those outlined above.

ALSO READ: [Snaring of Kruger animals gains momentum](#)

Bush meat trade fuelled by poverty

The bush meat trade is booming and it is understood to be driven by economic hardship. People cannot afford to buy meat from the butchery any more because it has become too expensive.

“I charge from R700 upwards [for a whole buck] depending on the size of the animal,” a dealer said. This while a carcass of similar size could fetch as much as R2 800 at a legal butchery. “I sell my meat to local people in the Hazyview and Bushbuckridge areas. I either deliver it to them or they collect it at my place. However, the big challenge we face when delivering meat is that we need to use a long detour to avoid being caught by the police.”

This dealer started selling bush meat after he lost his job in 2019. Since finding his feet in the bush meat industry, he has given up on looking for a job because he is now able to provide for his family.

A few bush meat poachers and dealers spoke to Lowvelder, also on condition of anonymity.



The pregnant giraffe that was snared.

A snare poacher said it takes two or three days to deliver a deal, depending on how big an animal the buyer wants. “I access the park via a hole in the fence. It is easy, especially next to the farms or residential areas. Once I am inside, I place the snares in different areas. I make the snares myself. When laying them, I first check the spoor in the area to make sure that I place the correct snare to catch the animal that I am after. However, sometimes you place a snare targeting an impala and you end up catching a bushbuck. The worst is to catch a cheetah, lion or leopard, because I have no market for them. Fortunately, in most cases, if the snares are positioned in the right place, there is a 99% chance of success,” he said.

Another poacher said he prefers to shoot the animals as it is much easier. He claimed to be working with Kruger staff on the inside who tell him where the animals are. “We are a team of three people

and we only go hunting if we have a customer. We go to the park and straight to where the animal is. We shoot it and carry it to the car next to the fence, and take it to the client. We specialise in all kinds of bush meat, except an elephant because it requires a lot of resources and you can get caught while trying to kill it,” he said.



Some of the snares that were removed in Kruger.

He said his father taught him poaching skills, and when his father passed away he took over the business. He said he has been poaching for 10 years and had managed to put his two sisters through college with the money.

“I understand very well that what I am doing is very wrong and unacceptable, because I am endangering myself. The animals are supposed to be protected; that is why they have a fence. But I

was forced by poverty to join the business. Many people are buying meat from poachers because it is cheap. At the butchery, with R700 you only get a small portion of the meat, while from the poachers they get the whole animal and can also sell the skin, head and legs to local traditional healers. Buyers of bush meat claim they are not stealing from anyone, but merely supporting the poachers who are taking animals that were created by God to be eaten.”

The Kruger’s spokesperson, Isaac Phaahla, condemned the poaching of wild animals and warned poachers that if they get caught, they will be harshly dealt with. “We condemn poaching and the selling of wild animals; it’s criminality. We are calling on the communities around the park to report any poaching-related matters to the police, or anyone who is selling wild meat. We have local and international tourists who visit the park to see the animals, but we will soon not have anything to show them and many people will lose their jobs,” he said.

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