

Poachers threaten viability of safari hunting industry in Hwange



Part of the voluntary anti poaching team with wire snares removed from hunting safari farms in Matetsi

Business Correspondent

RAMPANT poaching activities in Matetsi area of Hwange District are threatening the viability of safari hunting industry, a leading safari operator has said.

In an interview with Business Chronicle safari operator, Mr Wisdom Bushe Neshavi, said the upsurge in poaching case is crippling safari hunting, which is already reeling under the effects of the novel Covid-19) pandemic.

“The effects of Covid-19 have had a very negative impact on the tourism industry, particularly to game farmers like me. There have been no international flights, no clients and no income, subsequently leading to failure to pay salaries and service the farms by most operators,” he said.

“Poaching is the big thing in all the game farms this side of the country since the Covid-19 pandemic surfaced. High unemployment is forcing a lot of our fellow brothers into poaching. “The ‘stay at home’ call doesn’t work with poachers. Day and night, they navigate their way into farms, setting-up wire snares while some hunt using dogs.”

It is estimated that each safari farm in Matetsi area has lost out an average of US\$150 000 in potential revenue from hunting activities, which were anticipated this year.

Mr Neshavi is the owner of Okatoie Safaris and Tours Private Limited. He is also a manager and advisor at four safari farms within the Matetsi area. The enterprising safari farmer is also the secretary of Matetsi A2 Commercial Farmers Association as well as treasurer of Matetsi Eastern Block Safaris.

With the support of prominent retired professional hunter, Mr Jade Moyo, tutor at a learner professional hunters and guides institution, Mr Rodrick Mudondi, as well two safari farmers in the area, Mr Neshavi said they have since come up with a voluntary anti-poaching programme aimed at curbing poaching activities at safari farms in Matetsi.

“The response has been good and 11 learner professional hunter and guide students responded positively and have taken up a 14-day voluntary anti – poaching exercise,

which they have since extended to 21 days of voluntary patrol,” he said. The programme has become an added advantage to the students’ tutorials.

“These learner professional hunter and guide students also benefit from the first-hand practical feel of the situation on the ground. Information shared during patrols includes, patrolling techniques, flora and fauna identification, clientele care, basic bush awareness, tracking and survival skills among others,” he said. The voluntary anti-poaching exercise began on the first week of this month.

“This is a pioneer project and it is yielding positive results as we have removed more than 100 wire snares within a short space of time. However, funding such a programme entails numerous logistics. Currently the volunteers are self-funding with food and transport,” said Mr Neshavi.

He revealed that their plan was to expand the programme to cover all A1 and A2 farms in Matetsi but said they were constrained by lack of funding.