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Poachers kill black rhino in Matobo

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A BLACK rhino carcass was recently discovered in Makotama Resettlements, Matobo with a bullet in its forehead, in a suspected case of poaching.

The carcass, which was discovered on 7 February, was scanned with a GPX 5000 metal detector leading to the recovery of two wildlife sensors and a bullet head on the forehead.

A statement released by the Zimbabwe Republic Police confirmed that an investigation is now underway.

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“The ZRP is investigating a case of poaching of protected animals, where a Black Rhino carcass with horns missing was found at Makotama Resettlements, Matobo, on 7 February 2022. The carcass was scanned with a GPX 5000 metal detector leading to the recovery of two wildlife sensors and a bullet head on the forehead,” reads the statement.

Zimparks spokesperson, Mr. Tinashe Farawo added that investigations were underway.

In 1999 more than 2 200 black and white rhino roamed Zimbabwe, but in the following 15 years, poaching for the rhino horn has been rampant leading to the rhino population plummeting to an estimated figure of 766.

With a recent increase in security measures and anti-poaching patrols, rhinos can now only be found mainly on private estate and protected wildlife areas in Zimbabwe. Although the poaching rate of rhino in Zimbabwe has decreased, the population is still suffering and rhino have become locally extinct in many regions across Zimbabwe. If we are to conserve what is left of our rhino population in Zimbabwe we need to protect, manage and grow these isolated populations.

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Zimbabwe is home to the world’s fourth largest black rhino population after South Africa, Namibia and Kenya. Organized gangs of poachers slaughtered nearly one-quarter of the country’s rhinos between 2007 and 2009, and poaching remains the greatest threat today driven primarily by demand from Asian markets, particularly Vietnam and China.

Formerly degraded land that was converted from cattle ranges to wildlife management areas, Zimbabwe’s Lowveld region is now home to nearly 90% of the country’s rhino population. These large land tracts operate as wildlife-based businesses that help safeguard a variety of threatened species.

Over 50 rhinos were killed by poachers in Buby Valley Conservancy (BVC) in early 2019. This heavy poaching pressure resulted in population declines for both black and white rhino populations there. Responding to the increased threat, Buby Valley Conservancy dramatically increased its anti-poaching efforts.

Covid-19 related travel restrictions in Zimbabwe have contributed to a significant decrease of poaching incursions in Buby Valley. Increased protection and monitoring activities were able to be maintained during the pandemic. The combination has resulted in a population increase of 13.8% for black rhinos in Buby Valley during the first 6 months of 2020.

Regular rhino operations are important to rhino population health as well. In 2019 81 black and white rhinos in BVC were immobilised for various medical and conservation purposes. A total of 29 were ear-notched for identification, 50 were dehorned to remove poaching incentive, 21 were fitted with horn transmitters, and 20 were translocated to safer areas during the year. Six rhinos were also treated for poaching-related injuries. Year 2020 operations were postponed due to Covid-19, however there is hope that they can be restarted by the end of the year.

More details to follow...