

Poaching syndicates descend on safari

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Thupeyo Muleya, Beitbridge Bureau

POACHING syndicates have resurfaced at the Sentinel-Limpopo Safaris, about 78km west of Beitbridge Town where they are wantonly killing wild animals and derailing efforts of revamping the tourism industry after a Covid-19 hiatus.

In some instances, they are unselectively killing even pregnant game and use donkeys as means of transport. It is also understood that the continued poaching activities have become a threat to

tourism within the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conversation Area (TFCA). The mega safari land is jointly owned by Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana. Zimbabwe's side has the Nottingham Estate, Maramani communal lands and the Tuli National Park.

Indications are that an average of 30 animals, particularly impalas and elands are killed monthly by poachers. The organised poaching syndicates involving villagers from neighbouring Maramani area are wreaking havoc at Sentinel-Limpopo Safaris where they are mainly targeting baby impalas. In some instances, they are reportedly using dogs, torches, spears, snares and axes as hunting tools. The safari operator, Mrs Vanessa Bristow said yesterday in most cases the poachers find their way into the property at night.

"Sentinel Farm is being destroyed by local community poachers. Last night (Friday) Sentinel Anti-Poaching Unit intercepted a group of six poachers from Masera who had come with six donkeys that they use to carry the poached animals. They had already killed 16 impalas and the team managed to round up the donkeys but the suspects got away. If this is allowed to go on there will be no more wildlife in this area of Beitbridge."

Mrs Bristow said it was unfortunate that the safari operator was paying huge amounts of money to get hunting quotas and yet the people from surrounding communities were less concerned about wildlife and conservation issues. She said they were hoping that local leaders would intervene and reign in on the poaching kingpins.

Despite night patrols that have seen some of the suspects being arrested, she said poaching continued unabated resulting in a decline in wildlife populations in the safari area.

"The poachers are known in the communities and should be identified and punished. We are also appealing to the courts to apply strong, and dissuasive sentences on such offenders. In some instances, the poachers hunt the animals down with a pack of dogs that scare the animals. They then shine spotlights at the animal to blind them, and move in with spears. It's devastating. Some people rely on the poachers for meat and some of the poachers are commercial operators."

Beitbridge's senior traditional leader, Chief Stauze (David Mbedzi) urged community members to take issues of wildlife and environmental conservation seriously. He said it was sad to note that the poachers were killing the animals for selfish reasons and diminishing the population of wildlife

especially small game. Chief Stauze said village heads, councillors and other leaders should collaborate in fighting the scourge of poaching.

“Besides poaching, trespassing in someone’s property is a crime on its own. I want to warn those involved in this horrendous crime, that the long arm of the law will catch up with them. As traditional leaders, we don’t condone such activities. Members of the community know these poachers, they live with them and we encourage them to report such people to authorities for corrective measures to be taken.” – @tupeyo.