

# South Africa: Hungry Poachers Killing Kruger Animals for Meat

- *Rangers say poachers are starving young men who kill animals for meat, not traditional medicine, and dry the meat inside the park.*
- **More than 120 vultures were poisoned after eating meat from a dead elephant laced with toxic chemicals used by poachers.**

Hungry and desperate, people living near Kruger National Park are turning to poaching to survive.

About 80% of the population in the area depend on illegal hunters who sneak into the park to kill wild animals for food. The meat is either eaten or sold to local butchers who pass it on to poor community members at low prices.

Kruger field rangers say these poachers are young, armed and willing to risk their lives. They kill anything they can find, dry the meat at makeshift camps inside the park and carry it out once it is light enough.

Masindi Raselabe, senior section ranger at Mooiplaas, said the poachers do not collect animal parts like skins or claws. "We realised through community engagements that it's for the meat," he said.

He added that many of the poachers don't know the park well. "They just set up camps and start hunting. The meat is hung on ropes to dry. Once they get it out, it ends up at butcheries where it's sold without anyone knowing if it's safe to eat."

This illegal activity is not only dangerous to animals, but also to rangers who patrol the park on foot.

In May, more than [120 vultures died after eating a poisoned elephant carcass](#) left behind by poachers. Rangers believe the poison was used to stop vultures from giving away the location of the kill. Luckily, 81 vultures were saved and released back into the wild.

Andrew Desmet, senior ranger at Mhlangeni, said vultures help rangers find dead animals and track down poachers.

Kruger authorities say they still don't know whether the poachers come from Mozambique, on the park's eastern side, or from South Africa.

South African National Parks spokesperson Ike Phaahla said the problem is growing. "We are not sure where this syndicate is coming from. But we know they come from nearby communities and even inside the park," he said.

He believes the government should do more to educate communities about protecting wildlife and reporting poachers.

In August 2022, [over 100 dead vultures and a hyena were found dead](#) after feeding on a dead buffalo near a fence bordering a village in the Kruger National Park.

At the time, SANParks said that the buffalo appeared to have been laced with poison and the vultures and hyena appeared to have fed off the carcass.

A further 20 vultures were discovered at the scene in a bad condition - and rushed to Shingwedzi and Moholoholo rehabilitation centres.

