

KRUGER PARK **T**IMES

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Shocking rise in rhino poaching

Six new tuskers identified

INSIDE: CAR THIEF NABBED | CHILD TRAFFICKING | ADDO'S BIGGEST TUSKER DIES | FIRES IN KRUGER | POACHERS TARGET SUMMER IMPALA LILY | DREAM JOB

Photo: Lynette Strauss



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On May 27, Mooiplaas section ranger, Johann Oelofse, was travelling along the Mozambican border fence when his wife Jocelyn spotted what she thought may have been a monitor lizard.

"I had already passed the spot and had to reverse to see her sighting. What we saw was a bent double section of a large snake that had its head into a deep crack in the boulder. I immediately realised that this was a black mamba and switched off the engine so as not to alarm it.

"We did not have to wait long before the snake slowly backed out of the crevice and there it was, the biggest black mamba that I have seen in all my years in the Kruger National Park (KNP). "It took our breath away in both its beauty and ominous aura. We were clearly fortunate that the snake's head was tucked so deeply down the crevice as this gave us the opportunity to arrive unobserved and to remain dead quiet while it went about its business of scouting out the crevice for prey. We could not believe our luck to take a whole string of pictures before the snake leisurely reversed its direction over the boulder and disappeared behind it without ever showing signs of being aware of our presence.

"My conservative estimate of this snake's size was that it must have been in excess of 3m long with a girth of at least 50mm at thickest point." **Photo: Johann Oelofse**

Poacher shot in Kruger

On June 14, rangers in the Kruger National Park (KNP) wounded a suspected rhino poacher. He was shot in the arm, hip and shoulder.

The incident occurred in the Vlakteplaas section where the suspect walked into an ambush set by the rangers.

Rangers first noticed suspicious tracks in the section on Sunday June 13 during a routine patrol. On Monday, while tracking the spoor, they heard a gunshot which led them to a fresh rhino carcass with its horn removed.

More gunshots closer to the rangers alerted their attention to a man walking in the distance. They remained still until they heard the sound of an axe. They positioned themselves in ambush and waited. After removing the second horn, the suspect left the scene in the direction where the rangers were lying in wait.

As soon as he realised he was surrounded, he opened fire, which the rangers returned, wounding him in the process.

According to the tracks more people may have been in the area, but they were not found.

The suspect was taken to Malamulele Hospital and is under guard while further investigations continue. "We wish to send a strong warning to other poachers that this is war. We are prepared to fight; we cannot allow these heartless and senseless killings of rhino to continue," said the KNP's head of department: public relations, William Mabasa.

"Please stay away from the Park as the rangers and Environmental Crime Investigations unit will do everything to ensure we mean business in dealing with this.

"We would also like to urge the public to report any information that may assist us to stop poachers before they enter the park and this information can be given to the nearest police station." concluded Mabasa.

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In short

KNP RANGERS HELP NAB CAR THIEF SUSPECT

A suspect was wounded when he tried to run away from the police and Kruger National Park (KNP) section ranger, Rodney Landela, on June 1, 2010. Another suspect escaped and had not been apprehended at the time of going to press.

The culprits were driving two stolen trucks through the Phalaborwa section of the park, possibly on their way to Mozambique, which borders Kruger in the east.

Rodney and the police reacted to an early morning tip-off on June 1 that the park fence in the Malopeni area had been cut. Moving swiftly, they set up an ambush in case of any activity in the area. The trucks soon approached, with headlights blazing. The drivers stopped and tried to flee as soon as they realised they were busted.

"To avoid getting hurt, we would like to warn criminals to stay away from the Park and not use it as a thoroughfare for their illegal deeds; our rangers are always on the look-

out for criminals and will do everything in their power to ensure the Park remains crime free," cautioned William Mabasa, the KNP's HOD: Public Relations.

The wounded suspect was arrested and is in police custody for further investigations. "The consequences would have been worse as lives could have been lost during this incident," concluded Mabasa.

TZANEEN GREENIES GET TOGETHER TO FORM ECO CLUB

Following many requests for an environmental group in Tzaneen, an introductory meeting will be held just after the June/July school holidays.

Meetings of the Tzaneen Eco Club will take place about 10 times a year and will take the form of talks and outings. Subjects will be varied and will cover everything from astronomy to zoology.

Talks will usually take place on a Friday evening and there may be a related field outing the following day. Other outings and weekends to a number of the interesting areas in

the region and further afield will be organised from time to time.

"Tzaneen and the surrounding area has a huge base of skilled and knowledgeable people on subjects as diverse as astronomy, birding, botany, conservation agriculture, entomology, fresh water ecology, geology ... the scope is almost endless," says Pierre Naude, one of the founder members.

"And we are situated in an amazingly diverse area with bushveld, forest and grassland within half an hour's drive and with hundreds of birds and trees all around us. We have plains game and Big Five just on our doorstep and the geology and ecology of our area is fascinating."

In addition to meetings and outings purely for interest and fun, the Club will offer occasional special courses for people who want to gain either an introductory or a more specialised knowledge into particular aspects of the environment.

Some possibilities are beginner's courses like 'An Introduction to Birding' and 'An Introduction to Trees', and more advanced courses like raptor identification and tracking

and field craft.

Activities will be open to everyone and costs, where necessary (perhaps a reserve entry fee or an honorarium for a visiting speaker), will be kept to a minimum.

At present, the initiators of the club consist of Mike Amm, Pierre Naudé, Tony Schultz, Sarel Snyman and Peter Williams who, between them, have a far-reaching base of local and specialist knowledge. Pierre Naudé commented, "It is hoped that other people will soon volunteer to join this team!"

For more information contact Sarel Snyman (083 449 8200) or Pierre Naudé (083 778 4635).

KEEP KRUGER CLEAN

On June 9, Kruger National Park (KNP) staff and stakeholders, armed with refuse bags and loads of enthusiasm, targeted their annual clean-up campaign on a five kilometer stretch of the road leading to the Kruger Gate.

Kruger management started the Keep Kruger Clean-campaign four years ago, which has led to the nomination of champions throughout the park who drive various clean-up initiatives throughout the year.

In 2008, young people from communities adjacent to the park joined the initiative. Working with the Kruger champions, these 'Steenboks' promote clean-up activities in their various communities.

They are appointed for two years after which they graduate to become Junior Honorary Rangers. This year, the campaign focuses on recycling.

Littering in the park is illegal and offenders can be fined on the spot up to R1 500.

"People should change their perception about litter; the notion that "litter can create jobs" should not find space in the modern life that we live today.

Let us keep the Kruger, our communities and our country clean," says William Mabasa, KNP head of communications.



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Paul Kruger, president of the ZAR, proclaimed the Gouvernement Wildtuin (government game reserve) in 1898. It extended from the Crocodile River in the south to the Sabie River in the north, and from the Logies River (Nsikazi River) in the west to the Mozambique border in the east.



Shocking rise in rhino poaching leads to formation of new unit

Ruthless and highly organised criminals are butchering South Africa's rhinos at an alarming and escalating rate.

It is not only the rate at which these animals are being killed but also the manner in which this happens that has many South Africans calling for more stringent action.

In a recent incident in the Kruger National Park (KNP), poachers hacked the horn from a rhino while it was still alive, leaving the animal to stumble about with its face mangled to a bloody mess until the traumatised animal was spotted by horrified tourists.

Since January, the country has lost almost 100 rhinos, with the Kruger National Park (KNP) being the hardest hit in terms of numbers at 33, followed by the North West Province at 18 and 12 from the Gauteng Province. The least affected province has been the Eastern Cape Province with a loss of only two rhinos. The provinces' protected areas lost 32 rhinos while the private sector lost 27 rhinos. Four black rhinos have also been poached.

The South African National Parks (SANParks) and South African

government is facing increasing pressure from the public and other stakeholders to stop the poaching. On the other hand, the criminals are highly organised and have vast resources including highly sophisticated technology at their disposal.

In response to the spiralling problem, public and privately-owned nature reserves and conservation agencies joined forces with environmental affairs minister, Buyelwa Sonjica, who has set up a National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit (NWCURU).

This unit consists of the SAPS Organised Crime Unit, SANParks Environmental Crime Unit, the Provincial Conservation Anti-Poaching Unit and prosecutors at a national and provincial level. It will function with extended powers to include the expertise of the national director of public prosecution to fast track successful prosecution of suspected poachers.

SANParks chief executive Dr David Mabunda, said, "This move by the minister will also enable the various conservation agencies, including privately-owned game reserves, to populate poaching incident reports and allow for

accurate national poaching statistics, something that is key to the appropriate management and eventual reduction of this problem."

Dr Mabunda said this means that very soon the country will be able to identify problematic areas more effectively and direct resources accordingly.

"We are dealing here with organised crime and hardened criminals linked to notorious syndicates that the SAPS and Interpol are also looking for. We know that our combined efforts will reap fruitful results in the near future and SANParks stays committed to making every effort to wipe out this assault that is threatening our natural heritage."

The KNP is home to between 9,000 and 12,000 white rhinos, a large percentage of the approximately 19,000-strong South African population. Between 580 and 650 black rhinos of the country's population of 1,670 black rhinos are also found in Kruger. The other national parks with rhino populations collectively have an estimated 124 white rhinos and 107 black rhinos.

South Africa has seen an escalating assault on its rhino populations

in the last three years, with the first alarming spike in 2008 with the loss of 83 rhinos, a sharp rise from the mere 13 rhinos lost the previous year. South Africa lost a further 122 rhinos in 2009. This is the highest level of poaching for rhino horn that has ever been experienced by the country.

Thus far 25 suspected poachers have been arrested, with 17 having been arrested in the KNP, five in Gauteng and three in Mpumalanga.

Dr Mabunda said it is important for South Africans to be vigilant everywhere in the country because this is a problem that is escalating throughout the world and not only a problem in Kruger, as is the impression that seems to be coming through.

It must be understood that not only does the KNP house the majority of rhinos resident in any one property in the country, but it also holds about 300km of the eastern international border of the country. This makes it easier for such criminals to elude the arm of the law by escaping into the neighbouring countries.

SANParks appreciates the return of the army to patrol this border and it is hoped that with their interven-

tion at least one of the escape routes for these wildlife criminals will be made near impossible to breach.

Dr Mabunda said having recently visited Tanzania, he was saddened to hear that a population of over one thousand Eastern African *Diceros michaeli* sub species of rhino has been reduced to ten rhinos since 1960. "Rhinos are under siege from marauding poachers all over the world. Asia and India are suffering the same trend of these species being driven to near extinction through poaching."



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Luxury estate living

On the rich green verge of the historic Sabie River, surrounded by landscape lawns and lush waterfront gardens, Kruger Park Lodge provides a sumptuous base for an unforgettable African adventure. With the accent on uncompromising comfort and gracious living, this award winning estate offers a sophisticated and leisurely lifestyle in the heart of big game country.

For the golfing enthusiast there's the challenge of the resort's superb 9-hole golf course designed by Gary Player, set among the indigenous flora of the Lowveld with birds in the trees, buck on the fairways and hippo in the waterholes.

The course, rated 71, offers one a 18-hole challenge via 9-other tees positioned at various angles and distances from the green.

In addition to the well treed bushveld landscape, 400 more indigenous trees have been planted on and around the

well drained lush fairways, along with new water features strategically placed on the 3rd and the 9th holes. The golf course is an integral part of the overall well maintained resort landscape, allowing different habitats for many bird species.

Other facilities on the resort include 3 swimming pools, 5 flood-lit tennis courts, putt-putt, and a driving range on the adjoining property.

Bird watching and scenic walks can be enjoyed along the banks of the tranquil Sabie River, or a bicycle ride around the lodge's extensive estate. Relax in the hippo hide which provides a splendid vantage point for hippo viewing and appreciate the drama of a golden African sunset. Enjoy the resort's clubhouse which has a restaurant and full conference facilities. Kruger Park Lodge is managed by the prestigious Legacy Hotels & Resorts group.



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The Kruger Park Lodge Estate is situated on a 9 hole Gary Player designed golf course on the banks of the Sabie River in Hazyview, Mpumalanga, only 10 min. From the world famous Kruger National Park. The resort offers guests a tranquil and peaceful haven away from the madding crowds. Developed by Magic Breakaways Leisure Developments and managed by Legacy Hotels and Resorts. It is rated as one of the top Gold Crown Resorts in Southern Africa.



Contact Gary Rowan 083 377 7748/ 013 737 5096