

AFRICA

Poaching crisis in KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa, has been affected by illegal rhinoceros killings since a poaching crisis began in 2008, but in recent years poaching levels have been declining—until now. In 2022, the province saw a surge in poaching: between January and June, 133 rhinoceroses were killed in the region. This was more than half of all rhinoceroses poached in South Africa and more than three times the number poached in the province during the same period in 2021. The increase appears to be linked to a declining rhinoceros population in Kruger National Park, which has previously been the primary target of poaching. Poachers now appear to move south and turn their attention to the higher-density populations in smaller reserves across KwaZulu-Natal. As a result, rangers across the province are regularly facing life-threatening, distressing and demoralizing situations.

Source: *Save The Rhino International* (2022) savetherhino.org/africa/poaching-crisis-in-kwazulu-natal

Shocking blow to Indigenous land rights as court dismisses Maasai herder claim

Lawyers for Maasai herders, who say the Tanzanian government is trying to violently evict them from their ancestral land, have lodged an appeal against a court ruling that has dismissed their case. The legal battle dates back to 2017, when residents of four Maasai villages in northern Tanzania went to court to try to stop authorities evicting them from 1,500 km² of land in Loliondo, bordering the Serengeti National Park. If carried out, more than 70,000 Maasai would be affected by the move. The government claims the land is within the Park and should therefore be given over solely to conservation purposes rather than being affected by human activity. The herders, however, say the land has been rightfully theirs for generations and accuse the authorities of wanting to use it to create a luxury game reserve. The court had issued an interim order in 2018 that stopped evictions, but tensions increased in June 2022 when violence erupted between police and Maasai demonstrators, after authorities began to demarcate land boundaries. In its recent ruling, the court found that the Maasai had failed to prove they had been evicted from their village land and not from the Serengeti itself.

Source: *The Guardian* (2022) theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/05/shocking-blow-to-indigenous-land-rights-as-court-dismisses-maasai-herder-claim

Ecology of fear in a South African savannah

South African ungulates react differently to different species of predators, according to experiments by a research team. The findings demonstrate that the behavioural responses of ungulates to large predators can shape ecosystem structure and function. In the Greater Kruger National Park, South Africa, the researchers examined the fearfulness that ungulates displayed in response to playbacks of lion, African wild dog, cheetah or non-predator (bird) control vocalizations. They used only short-range sounds like snarls and growls, rather than roars, to imitate the proximity of a predator, then used a speaker attached to a video trap to broadcast these sounds to wild animals. The speaker was activated to broadcast a predator sound when the camera sensed an animal moving in the area. It found that ungulates reacted most fearfully to lions, followed by wild dogs, and least to cheetahs, showing a distinct hierarchy of fear. Notably, the patterns were not predicted by the hunting success rates of the predator species.

Source: *African Conservation Foundation* (2022) africanconservation.org/ecology-of-fear-in-a-south-african-savanna

Malagasy giant jumping rat declared Critically Endangered

The Malagasy giant jumping rat, endemic to Madagascar, has been threatened by habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation for years. In the latest IUCN Red List update, the species has been recategorized from Endangered to Critically Endangered. Substantial habitat loss across the species' range has been the result of aridification and human activities. Slash-and-burn agriculture, logging, charcoal production, and illegal maize and peanut cultivation have all contributed to unprecedented rates of deforestation in the now-protected Menabe Antimena area. By 2014, c. 4,000 ha of forest was being lost per year. The Malagasy giant jumping rat, which can spring almost 1 m into the air thanks to its large back feet, is also susceptible to hantaviruses recently detected in other rodents in Madagascar. In addition, it is subject to negative impacts of feral cats and dogs, which pose a risk as predators and carriers of disease. These challenges have driven a severe and ongoing drop in the species' population, with an estimated decline of 85% between 2007 and 2019, and only c. 5,000 individuals now remaining.

Source: *Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust* (2022) durrell.org/news/in-need-of-a-bounce-back-malagasy-giant-jumping-rat-declared-critically-endangered

Capacity building in West Africa to save vultures

In recent years, mortality of vultures caused by targeted and unintentional poisoning has increased across Africa. Populations of African-Eurasian vultures have plummeted by up to 97% over the last 50 years, with the biggest declines in West and East Africa, and many species listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. There is a critical need to build capacity for responding to poisoning events, including identifying sites where vultures die, collecting samples and employing techniques to investigate the cause of death. In 2022, BirdLife International, in collaboration with Andre Bothe, a vulture specialist from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, organized capacity building workshops in Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea Bissau on responding to wildlife poisoning incidents. The workshops focused on key elements including recognizing signs of poisoning, investigating the scene, and making it safe from toxins, all aimed at reducing the impact of wildlife poisoning in the region.

Source: *BirdLife International* (2022) birdlife.org/news/2022/11/16/responding-to-wildlife-poisoning-incidents-in-west-africa-to-save-vultures

Breeding success raises hopes for future of Endangered African penguin

Two African penguin *Spheniscus demersus* chicks have emerged from their nest beneath a boulder at De Hoop Reserve in South Africa, where conservationists have used lifelike decoy penguins and broadcast penguin calls to entice adult penguins to breed. This work began 4 years ago as part of a programme to protect the Endangered African penguin along South Africa's coastline. The birds prefer to nest on islands, but scarcity of sardines off South Africa's western coast has led to low survival rates of both adult and juvenile penguins at key breeding colonies. At De Hoop Reserve, there are rich fish stocks, but breeding at this mainland site exposes penguins to lethal predator attacks. To protect the penguins, conservationists erected a fence with electrified strands at the De Hoop breeding site, which is located on a rocky headland. Although a single breeding pair of African penguins at De Hoop will only make a small contribution to the conservation of the species, it is an important indicator of success.

Source: *Mongabay* (2022) news.mongabay.com/2022/11/breeding-success-raises-hopes-for-future-of-endangered-african-penguin