

Team effort only way to beat rhino poaching

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SKUKUZA: Strong partnerships between different role players in and around the Kruger National Park (KNP) remains the key to defeating the scourge of rhino poaching.



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South African National Parks (SANParks) has called on communities living close to the KNP to work in collaboration to help eradicate the scourge of rhino poaching ravaging the park.

Since the beginning of the year, KNP has lost over 380 rhinos as a result of poaching incidents and the numbers are likely to increase closer to the end of the year. Thus far, 64 arrests have been made.

Last week, a poacher was sentenced to 77 years of imprisonment, one of the heaviest sentences handed out for poaching. This month, two Mozambican nationals were each jailed 16 years for killing and dehorning rhino.

Acting Head of SANParks Communications, Reynold Thakuli, says the involvement of communities in managing South African parks remains a key element of conserving and preserving the country's biodiversity.

"We have a number of programmes that we have in partnership with different communities, particularly now with the scourge of rhino poaching.

"We have engaged faith-based organisations, traditional healer associations and tribal authorities to co-opt them into the management of these parks. Some of the guys who are poaching live within these communities," said Thakuli.

"We are not managing these parks as islands. We are working together with them and so far, we have received cooperation from them, especially on the South African side of the border."

KNP shares a border with Zimbabwe and Mozambique and covers over two million hectares of land with a variety of animals roaming free.

Earlier this year, South Africa and Mozambique signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of biodiversity and conservation.

Since the signing of the memorandum, cooperation between the two countries has increased. In the past year, a fence along the eastern boundary of the KNP has been erected and the buffer zone in Mozambique has been strengthened.

Echoing Thakuli's sentiment is retired Major General Johan Jooste, who says good intelligence from the community will go a long way in helping the two countries in dealing with the problem.

"You cannot win the war against poaching from inside the park - you must start outside and deal with the bosses and for that you need good intelligence from the communities to help you achieve that."

He said that partnerships between communities in Botswana, Swaziland and Namibia have yielded positive results in dealing with rhino poaching and that South African communities can learn from their neighbours.

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