

# Leopard killer faces charges for shooting predator on reserve

The man who shot dead a leopard in what was claimed to be self-defence on a hunting farm outside Grahamstown will be criminally charged for allegedly hunting the animal.

By [Gareth Wilson](#) 18 Aug 2017



Image source: [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com)

The probe into the killing of the leopard - which is a protected species under South African law - came after Dale Venske shot the animal on the reserve near Alicedale in January. Venske works as a vermin control officer on Burchell's Private Game Reserve where the leopard was killed.

Earlier this month, Venske was served with a summons to appear in the Grahamstown Magistrate's Court next month, where he is expected to be criminally charged.

The leopard mauled houndsman Zwelakhe Dyan during the incident, prompting the Environmental Affairs special investigations unit, known as the Green Scorpions, to investigate the shooting of the leopard and the attack on Dyan.

Officials said suspicions were raised when those involved gave conflicting statements.

It has since emerged that the dead leopard was the largest ever recorded in the Eastern Cape.

Provincial Green Scorpions director Div de Villiers confirmed that Venske was due to appear in court on 1 September.

Under the Animal Protection Act, hunting with dogs is also illegal under almost all circumstances. National Prosecuting Authority spokesman Tsepo Ndwalaza confirmed that Venske would be prosecuted for hunting a leopard without a permit and unlawfully using dogs to hunt a leopard.

Venske would have the option of paying an admission of guilt fine. "Admission of guilt fines of R8000 and R2000, respectively, will be set in respect of the charges," Ndwalaza said.

Hunting operator and reserve owner Barry Burchell, who is in Namibia, said Venske did not want to talk to the media. "There is an option of a fine [but] we will not pay. We are going to fight the case in court," he said.

Investigators have since discovered that a third person arrived shortly after the shooting.

At the time of the attack, Dyan described how the hunting dogs circled bushes and, when he investigated, he was confronted by a leopard. It is claimed that the predator charged Dyan, who suffered a broken shoulder and cuts, before being scared off. It is further claimed that the leopard then charged Venske, who shot it. However, investigators believe the men had attempted to hunt the leopard.

At the time, Burchell denied knowledge of a leopard on his property and claimed the dogs were part of a vermin pack registered with Nature Conservation. However, days later, he admitted knowing that there might be a leopard on his farm.

According to officials, who cannot be named as they do not have the authority to speak to the media, the cellphones of the involved in the incident were confiscated. They allegedly revealed messages and voice notes contradicting the original story about the leopard. The authorities believe they show Venske allegedly intended to hunt the leopard.

Shortly after the leopard was shot, the carcass was taken to a taxidermist, where it was going to be skinned and mounted. Investigators, however, confiscated the skin and remains. Analysis of the skeletal remains suggests the animal was shot in the side of the head. However, Venske claimed he shot the leopard while it was charging him.

Landmark Foundation director Dr Bool Smuts said the decision to prosecute was a landmark move. "It is the first time anyone will be charged for killing a leopard in the province.

"I hope this will see other similar [cases] prosecuted.

"Usually, the hunter falls back on the self-defence motive, which in our opinion is very weak."

Smuts said the leopard, weighing in at about 113kg, was the largest ever recorded in the Eastern or Western Cape.

*Source: Herald*