

Mtunzin's zebra crossings are real

A picturesque town on KwaZulu-Natal's north coast is trying to save its wild visitors. Four zebras roam the streets of Mtunzini freely, mingling with locals and often wandering into the local pub, supermarket and restaurants.



Some even bed-down in residents' back yards after being hand-fed bread and fruit.

Now homeowners are campaigning for a fence around the town to protect their special animals from poachers and the nearby N2 highway.

The enclosure is the largest yet proposed for a town in the province.

Local businessman Brendan Bristow, who launched the campaign to keep the zebras from wandering onto the busy national road, said the fence would cost about R3.5m.

A final study and measurement of the barrier, which will enclose the town's 1,000-odd homes, is still being compiled.

About 3,000 people have signed their support of the proposal, which will be presented to the uMhlalazi local municipality within the next two weeks.

"Although we want the municipality to foot the bill for the fence, we are prepared to do some fund-raising," said Bristow.

Two of the zebras, named Savannah and Njabulo, can often be found loitering inside Bristow's hostel for backpackers, *Nature's Way*, and another pair have made the nine-hole golf course their home.

Objections

The town's inhabitants have also objected to calls by the provincial authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, to have the "wild animals" relocated to a private game reserve.

This week the Mtunzini Residents Association showed the *Sunday Times* a letter from Ezemvelo proposing to "dispose of [the zebra] using other permanent means".

However, Ezemvelo spokesman Musa Mntambo said the authority had no objections to the fence or the zebra remaining in town - as long as the local municipality and residents took responsibility for them.

"It has never been our intention to kill them. Our proposal was to translocate them to any of the Ezemvelo reserves or a private game reserve where they can roam around and be safe from cars and any dangers associated with wild animals living in town," he said.

Municipal councillor Keith Powell declined to comment on the proposal until it had been presented to council.

Bristow's business partner, Claude Lango, said residents had also proposed erecting warning signs for visiting motorists and tourists.

"This will prevent any unfortunate incidents," he said.

Although the four zebras can often be found waiting outside the town's supermarket in the mornings, they have also become a major attraction at *Fat Cat*, a local restaurant.

Patrons described how tourists were often startled to see the zebras walking into the restaurant. Some visitors who had enjoyed one too many beers at the local pub even doubted their sanity when they saw zebras galloping through the streets at night, locals said.

According to the residents' association, the animals have become a huge tourist attraction for the town, which derives much of its revenue from eco-tourism, attracting more than 100,000 visitors a year.

Bristow said the zebras arrived in the town about six years ago and never left.

"One day I woke up and Savannah was on the lawn. Njabulo arrived a little later," he said.

When the zebras decide to sleep at the hostel - for free - they socialise with guests near a boma and often join night-owl guests in the hostel pub.

"They love mingling with the guests . it's just gorgeous," said Bristow.

The animals apparently moved into town after being kicked out of their herd by dominant males at the nearby Siyaya Coastal Park.

Resident Neil van Rooyen said the four had become the town's mascots and did not pose a threat to locals.

"I've known these zebras for years . they are harmless," he said.

Another zebra fan, Rankin Burger, said it would be a "darn shame" if the town lost the animals.

Source: *Sunday Times* via I-Net Bridge