

Drought stalks KZN wildlife

Rivers in Africa's oldest proclaimed game reserve, the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, are running dry.



Maria Adelaide Silva via [123RF](#)

Pictures taken by visitors last week show the devastation that government officials have described as the worst in 25 years. KwaZulu-Natal cooperative governance MEC, Nomusa Dube-Ncube, described the situation as a "crisis of calamitous proportions".

Water levels low

Rainfall in the province has been below-average for two consecutive seasons.

The 960ha park, proclaimed in 1895, is home to all of the Big Five and has the biggest white rhino population in the world. A spokesman for the provincial parks authority, KZN Ezemvelo Wildlife, Musa Mntambo, confirmed that the drought had severely affected the park. In September, at the end of a dry winter, boreholes had to be sunk into river beds and watering holes to provide water for the animals. The park is ready to repeat the exercise.

"So far the drought has affected the veld and the shallow rivers that run through the park so the reserve is not as green as normal, and rivers in the park have little water in them."

At the neighbouring iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a listed World Heritage site, the drought has also taken hold. "Water levels in the lakes, rivers, wetlands and pans across iSimangaliso are very low," said park CEO Andrew Zaloumis. However, thanks to an environmental management plan put in place in 2012, the park is faring better than previously. "I vividly recall in the last drought walking across Lake St Lucia " without getting my feet wet," Zaloumis said.

From a game perspective

But the inland game reserves in the park are being severely affected. "From a game perspective, pans and water points on the eastern shores, western shores and at the uMkhuze reserves are very low or dry. A system of boreholes and water-supply points for animals is in place. The situation is being closely monitored and more pumps will be switched on as and when necessary" he said.

Parched prospects

In March the Department of Water Affairs said that variations in climate were being compounded by climate change. "This year, whereas some parts of the country, such as Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, experienced heavy storms and floods, other provinces, such as KwaZuluNatal, North West and the Free State, experienced creeping and worsening drought," it said.

"Average annual rainfall in South Africa is only 495mm, whereas the world average is 1,033mm," said a report titled "Parched Prospects: The emerging water crisis in South Africa". The drought in KwaZulu-Natal is a result of the absence of the expected spring and summer rains.

"Spurred on by the Durban July next weekend, and the Ballito Pro surfing competition, tourism is still looking strong in the region despite the drought.

Source: The Times

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