

KNP Anti-Poaching Chief Speaks

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Africa Geographic's Scott Ramsay interviewed the anti-poaching chief of Kruger NP, Major-General Johan Jooste, in August. Here is a synopsis of the interview (download the full text [here](#)):

"Think Big, Start Small, Act Now" – this is how the 61-year-old ex-army general wants to tackle the poaching pandemic in South Africa's flagship park and protect its rhinos. Jooste says that "we are fighting a war ... rangers are performing military roles to battle poachers; we have to militarize our ranger corps". The manpower available to the general includes about 400 rangers, and about 150 other men, including special rangers, as well as an airwing with two helicopters, two fixed wing aircraft and two microlights, besides a small contingent of police and a joint command with an army company." The general added that KNP currently deploys one ranger for every 50 km², but ideally one ranger should supervise ca 10 km².

"Most of the poachers – ca. 80% - come from Mozambique, and enter the park south of the Olifants River; they infiltrate at night, walking up to 25km into the park" said the general and estimated "that about a dozen groups of 3 poachers each (about 36 to 40 individuals) operate up to 4 or 5 days in KNP at any time, and about 3 groups enter and exit KNP every day." According to Jooste, the poachers are aware that the anti-poaching units have to arrest them and are not allowed to kill them intentionally. "Shoot to kill will improve the units' success rate but it won't stop the poaching" added Jooste, "the poachers come into the park in such numbers that we can just not plug all the holes."

Jooste said that the 3-men poaching groups are usually uneducated men in their 20s, recruited from poverty, with remarkable bushcraft – formidable opponents with no rules. The rifle handler is equipped with a .458 or .375 rifle, the navigator knows the park and guides the group and the third man carries the knives and axe, food and water. A group can earn more than ZAR100,000 for one excursion; sometimes they are paid per kilogram, so they can earn over ZAR200,000 for two or three days work. This contains some powerful social dynamism; the adjacent communities don't own the park. It has never been theirs and people living there are asking "What do I get from that park? A few of my community work there, but most of us, what do we get?"

After taking up his assignment in 2013, Major General Jooste unified command structures and built intelligence networks; the units were equipped with technologies like detection and early-warning systems, fly-at-night capabilities, and designated protection zones were set up. Dog team units were deployed and will be expanded in the park and at the gates (one of the dogs as explosive detector to pick up ammunition or weaponry, the other is trained to pick up animal products, specifically rhino horn).

Efforts concentrate in the south which holds a quarter of the world's rhino on 20% of the KNP surface area. Jooste said that his units need "to create a safe haven, a bastion, a fortress to make sure that we safeguard this core population". A fortified, monitored fence will be erected in the south, on the east of the intensive protection zone, from the southern boundary of the park to a latitude north of Skukuza.

When poachers are caught police is called in and meticulous crime scene management provides proof in the court. With international organized crime backing the poachers, bail and legal defense is often provided, so careful management of the crime scene is essential. "We have a better conviction rate, the turn-around time is quicker, and the sentences are harsh", said Jooste; "in 2013, we neutralized 133 poachers, of which 47 were killed. This year so far we have neutralized 76, of which about 20 have been killed."

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Although growth in poaching is slowing down, poaching is not decreasing and a national, regional and global solution is needed, of which demand reduction is critical as well as disrupting the networks and focus on nailing the Mozambican middlemen.

The general expressed his dissatisfaction that nothing is happening in Mozambique, whose citizens are making armed, illegal incursions into South Africa, and plundering the country's resources. He said that "we know many of the "level 2" bosses, living in Massingir. 80% of the solution lies in taking these guys out. We will expect that soon we will have the ability to work with the Mozambican police to pursue the middlemen." ... "We have good informer networks in Mozambique and a standing reward for information that leads to a conviction", he added.

Commenting on the recent poaching of two elephant bulls in the north of KNP, the general mentioned that part of the solution lies in the holistic approach of regional asset protection by a regional, even a continental task force to protect rhinos, elephant and other animals. Importantly law-enforcement and intelligence networks are needed, demand has to be reduced and the syndicates must be nailed.

Jooste added that "we have to decide what we do with our current rhinos. We decided that relocating them is part of the solution and initially about 260 rhinos, but ultimately about 500 will be moved, in the short term mostly to private game reserves or state protected areas in the Northern Cape, but other countries are not excluded. The rhinos Kruger relocated to these places are not allowed to be hunted." The revenue from selling these rhinos is about ZAR300,000 per animal and the funds are coming back to SANParks, and most of it will go to conservation, but Jooste's anti-poaching team will benefit too.

Jooste also gave his personal opinion on legal rhino horn trade: "I've read so much about it, and I'm not sure what the long-term effect will be. Will legal trade help in the short-term, or will it put pressure on us in the long-term. Can it solve the problem? It's very hard to tell so I'm not sure about trade. But on the other hand, what options do we have? This problem does not have a single, lasting solution. We need a set of solutions that evolves. There are no easy answers."

As long-term solutions Jooste offered two options: "Giving ownership of Africa's parks to surrounding communities, so they take responsibility themselves for their wildlife, so they feel a strong sense of ownership in the wellbeing of their wildlife. And second, we have to reduce demand in Vietnam, Thailand and China."

Scott Ramsay put a final question to Major General Jooste "Are you and your team in Kruger going to win this war? And received a short and simple answer: **YES!**

Scott Ramsay spends most of each year exploring Southern Africa's protected areas, taking photographs and interviewing the experts who work in the protected areas. For more, go to www.yearinthewild.com or www.facebook.com/yearinthewild

Devastating Decline Of Forest Elephants In Central Africa

Citation: Maisels F, Strindberg S, Blake S, Wittemyer G, Hart J, et al. (2013) [Devastating Decline of Forest Elephants in Central Africa](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0059469). PLoS ONE 8(3): e59469. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0059469

African forest elephants— taxonomically and functionally unique—are being poached at accelerating rates, but we lack range-wide information on the repercussions. Analysis of the largest survey dataset ever assembled for forest elephants (80 foot-surveys; covering 13,000 km; 91,600 person-

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