

MEDIA STATEMENT
ILLEGAL POISONING OF WILDLIFE ON THE INCREASE
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The recent death of vultures, Blue Cranes, Brown Hyaenas and other wildlife due to illegal poisoning should be a wake-up call for South African conservation authorities, law enforcement agencies and conservationists. While rhinos are faced with a grave poaching threat, other equally important wildlife species, especially scavengers and predators are at risk of joining rhinos on the route of steep decline if the current spate of illegal poisoning continues.

The recent death of sixty six vultures in the Lowveld was confirmed by toxicological analysis as a poisoning case; at least one carbamate pesticide was detected in the analysis. More recent incidents in which ungulates were snared and their carcasses poisoned to kill vultures for traditional medicine are just the tip of the iceberg. In 2012 mass poisoning of Blue Cranes occurred in the Karoo. This is as yet, unresolved. Last week farmers reported that at least sixteen Brown Hyaenas died probably as a result of poisoning in the Limpopo Province, and earlier this year Black-Backed Jackals were deliberately poisoned in the Addo Elephant National Park. Poisoned baits aimed at rhinos are often found in the Kruger National Park and Associated Private Nature Reserves. Fortunately, no rhinos have been poisoned to date in this important conservation area. Unfortunately many of the wildlife poisoning incidents become “cold cases” as the culprits are never found.

Deliberate poisoning of wildlife is definitely on the increase. Some of the poisonings are committed by poachers who kill wildlife for traditional medicine; vultures are mostly targeted for their heads that are used in divination. Lions have also allegedly been poisoned for their bones as part of the lion bone trade that services the Far East. Elephants have been poisoned in Zimbabwe to obtain their ivory, probably also for the lucrative illegal ivory trade in the Far East.

What is of grave concern is the illegal use of pesticides and other poisons such as sodiummonofluoroacetate by livestock and wildlife owners to kill predators. Despite a concerted effort by the livestock industry driven Predation Management Forum (PMF) to offer farmers alternatives to poisoning predators, some individuals do not heed to warnings to refrain from illegal use of pesticides and poisons. Provincial conservation agencies have warned that the liberal distribution and use of sodiummonofluoroacetate (also known as Compound 1080) is illegal, and should any retailer or landowner be found in possession of it, they will be prosecuted. There is reason to believe that vultures in the Eastern Cape and the sixteen Brown Hyaenas in Limpopo were



poisoned with Compound 1080; further investigations are geared to identify the particular toxins that were used to kill these animals.

State departments are at a loss for funds to conduct toxicological analysis and often request the Griffon Poison Information Centre to fund such analyses. Villa Crop Protection, one of the largest agricultural remedy suppliers in the country supports the centre with financial backing to conduct toxicological analysis. Villa MD, Dr André Schreuder says “Illegal poisoning of wildlife is a huge risk not only to South Africa’s natural environment but also to agriculture. Many of our important products are deliberately misused to poison animals. It creates a negative perception of agricultural remedies if criminals misuse them to poison wildlife. Villa is determined to undermine individuals who poison wildlife illegally by supporting investigations into their crimes”. Tommy Fraser, a director of Villa Crop Protection, game farmer and conservationist believes that a concerted effort is required from conservationists, farmers and law enforcement agencies to stem the poisoning of wildlife: “poisoning is like a death warrant to all life forms. It hits far beyond the scope of the intended target. If nothing is done, we may not see our rare birds like vultures fly into the 22nd Century”.

Livestock owners that experience stock losses due to predation are likely to consider poison as a remedy. Only the poison collar is legal and only after a permit is obtained from the conservation authorities. It is well known that aldicarb, carbofuran, methomyl and Compound 1080 are illegally used to poison predators. The results are devastating and over the past two years many vultures have perished at the hands of those who lay out poisoned baits.

The Griffon Poison Information Centre endeavours to rid the country of illegal poisoning. Its supporters, many of which are farmers, are gathering intelligence on those individuals who illegally poison wildlife. On the other hand it is offering a hand of assistance *via* the Predation Management Forum to mitigate predation. Information and assistance may be requested via www.pmfesa.co.za.

Any information about illegal wildlife poisoning may be called into 082-446-8946 or nesher@tiscali.co.za.

For more information call Dr Gerhard Verdoorn on 082-446-8946

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